**University of Alberta**

# Wang Ruoxu (1174 – 1243) and his "Talks on Poetry"

By

Mhairi Kathleen Campbell

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Chinese Literature

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the *shihua* ("talks on poetry") of Jin dynasty (1115 – 1234) literatus Wang Ruoxu (1174 – 1243). As the only remaining *shihua* text from the Jin period, Wang Ruoxu's *Hunan shihua* (*Talks on Poetry from South of the River Hu*) is an invaluable source of information regarding the poetic mores of the day. Wang Ruoxu's principal critical beliefs are examined, and his vitriolic attack on Northern Song poet Huang Tingjian (1045 – 1101) is assessed in detail. In seeking to explain the polemic nature of Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism, this thesis asserts that a combination of social and cultural factors combined to cause Wang to write a *shihua* with the intention not only of commenting on literary, particularly poetic, aesthetics, but also of preserving and participating in the Confucian tradition.

# Preface

Frequently used works are abbreviated throughout the text with the full title given upon first reference. For traditional Chinese texts the following method of citation is used: Title, *juan* (volume). Page *recto/verso*, e.g. *Shangu quanji* 6.4ab means *Shangu quanji*, *juan* 6, page 4 *recto* and *verso*. Works numbered with Western-style pagination are cited only by page number. Where traditional *juan* division and western pagination is used in each chapter citation is as follows: 4.23 – 24 which means *juan* 4, pages 23 and 24.

Chinese names are given in the traditional form of surname first followed by given name. Pinyin romanization is used throughout and Chinese characters are given upon first occurrence in the main body of the text. Translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged.

## Acknowledgements

I have been fortunate enough to receive the assistance of a number of people in the course of researching and writing this thesis and would like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks.

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# Introduction

Jin dynasty (1115 – 1234) China is a period in the history of Chinese culture which, for various reasons, has been largely overlooked, particularly in the area of literary history. Cultural bias stigmatizes this period as one akin to the European Dark Ages in cultural decline for the simple reason that the ruling minority were of Jurchen rather than Han Chinese ethnicity. Studies of the philosophical and literary history of China generally depict a continuous evolution from the Northern to Southern Song (960 – 1279) and then to the Yuan dynasty (1260 – 1368), ignoring the fact that Han Chinese literati living and working in the area of China under foreign rule continued to apply themselves to literary and cultural pursuits. The Jin dynasty literati read and reacted to the works of the Northern and, to a certain extent, Southern Song, and the Southern Song literati were in turn exposed to the writings of their brethren in the north.

Recent studies have shown the unexpected extent to which the literati culture of the Yuan dynasty was based on Jin dynasty models. Vernacular literature and the narrative "chantefable" drama (*zhugongdiao* 諸宮調) in particular can be traced to roots in the northern Jin dynasty tradition. In the realm of poetry, especially in the latter years, Jin dynasty poets such as Yuan Haowen produced work on a par with some of the finest examples in Chinese history. The Jin literati of both Han Chinese and Jurchen ethnicity also sought to participate in traditional Chinese culture by engaging in scholarship and discussion concerning the literary arts. Jin dynasty literatus Liu Qi speaks of a great debate which raged among the literati in the later years of the Jin dynasty concerning the relative merits of form and content in writing, particularly poetry.

Despite this, however, the poetry and poetry criticism of the Jin dynasty has remained almost completely unstudied. In the past decade there have been several pioneering studies of Jin dynasty poetry and poetics by Chinese scholars such as Hu Chuanzhi,

Zhang Jing, Zhang Jian and Gu Yisheng, but there are as yet few English language studies. One reason for this is the paucity of source materials relative to what exists for the Song and later dynasties. Much was lost in the bloody conquest of the Jin state by the Mongols and the low status afforded the Jin as a non-Chinese dynasty hastened the loss of further materials in later periods. In the realm of literature we are now left with a number of collected works and *biji* writings, some only partially preserved, by a small number of Jin dynasty writers.

The critical writings of literatus Wang Ruoxu 王若虛 (1174 – 1243) have survived and they provide a revealing glimpse into the cultural realm of the Jin period. Together with Liu Qi's *Guiqian zhi*, Wang's *shihua* ("talks on poetry") provides the majority of the information available to us concerning poetic mores at the time. *Shihua* 詩話 are a type of informal prose written in a light, conversational tone and offering what appear to be casual, off-the-cuff comments on poetry arranged in a random fashion. First appearing in the eleventh century and still written in the present day, over one thousand *shihua* have been preserved and fragments of others exist in anthologies. They range in style from attempts to outline the history of poetry to curt, pithy comments giving the writer's thoughts and impressions.

*Shihua* form part of a long history of literary criticism in pre-modern China. The earliest remarks which can be seen as precursors to literary criticism date from the pre-Confucian era (sixth century B.C. to second century A.D.) and are comments by individual authors in the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) who say that their intention was to criticise a ruler, express their sorrow or make their will known to others, to name but a few examples. This was further developed in the *Great Preface* to the *Shijing* which sets forth the idea which was to remain a central concept in literary thought for many centuries to come that "poetry expresses the will" (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志). That is, if poetry is filled with powerful human emotion then it can have bearing upon politics and the social and cosmic order. The *shi* poem which developed from the second century A. D. continued to embody these properties, but also added the idea of poetry as a form of cultivating one's spiritual self.

Comments attributed to Confucius in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) raised another issue which was to remain of great importance throughout the course of critical thought in pre-modern China, namely the balance between content and form. Confucian thought held that poetry was a reflection of the times in which it was written but that in order to give an effective portrayal of the ideas of that age a certain degree of embellished language was required. However, there had to be a fine balance between content and the degree of embellishment used to express that content.

By the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) the commentary had become an established form of criticism and it became firmly entrenched in literary thought as a reaction to the rise of the fictive persona in the new *fu* style of poetry. Allegorical reading could compensate for the fact that writing in adopted personae negated the Confucian concern for the public realm and the assumption that poetry derived from personal, everyday experience.

The Han dynasty also saw the first work solely devoted to poetics in the form of Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187 – 226) *Lunwen* 論文 (*Discourses on Literature*). In this work Cao purported some influential new developments in literary thought, positing that the quality of a piece of literature was a direct reflection of the *qi* 氣 (vital force) of its author. As *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* explains, "[t]he supreme value of poetry... lies primarily in the individual's creative vigor (*qi*), a kind of operative energy that gives literature immortality."[1] Again, this idea was to remain highly influential in later ages and from it developed the concern with self-expression which arose in the Wei-Jin era (220 – 316) and reached its height in the Southern Dynasties period (420 – 589) with Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (c. 465 – 518) *Shipin* 詩品 (*Categories of Poetry*). The *Shipin* held the personal, reflective aspect of poetry as being of primary importance and says that it should not be spoiled by excessive concern with such literary features as metrics or classical allusion.

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[1] Alex Preminger & T. V. F. Brogan, eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 193.

The Tang dynasty (618 – 907) was not an age of great literary critics or theorists, but rather one of great poets and writers. Following on from the *Shipin* and its precursors, personal reflection was still considered to be the main purpose of the lyric poem. However, more emphasis came to be placed on the way in which the poet gave expression to these reflections. The Southern Dynasties period had seen changes in the definition of *wen* 文 (patterns) which now meant exclusively literature (*wenxue* 文學) and no longer included composition (*wenzhang* 文章), and the use of rhyme became the defining feature of literature. As a result, in the Tang dynasty great emphasis came to be placed on the development of rules governing rhyme, tonal variation and other aspects of prosody, rules which had not up to then been in existence. The main developments in critical thought stemmed from these new rules with works such as Wang Changling's 王昌齡 (c. 690 – 756) *Shige* 詩格 (*Models of Poetry*) putting forth the idea that a poem is a union of the poet's mind with the world around him and that the poet achieves his position in society through his ability to skilfully manipulate language, and Jiaoran's 皎然 (730 – 799) *Shishi* 詩式 (*Exempla of Poetry*) claiming that manipulation of language to create the appearance of effortless naturalness was of utmost importance.[2]

By the Northern Song period (960 – 1127), a number of developments had taken place in the field of poetry. The *ci* form had replaced the *shi* as the primary vehicle for purely lyrical expression while the *shi* now entered the new realm of philosophical and intellectual discussion. It became less ornate in language and explored the details of everyday life. It also became inextricably linked with the concept central to neo-Confucianism, that of self-cultivation.[3] In the flourishing realm of poetry criticism, the opposition between the Yuanyou 元祐 and the Shaoshu 紹述 groups was to dominate. The former group included such poets and critics as Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi and Hui Hong and were most concerned with a naturalness of style in poetry writing. The opposing

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[2]Craig Fisk, "Literary Criticism" in William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 53.

[3] For more information on the development of *shi* poetry in the Song period, see Kōjirō Yoshikawa, *An Introduction to Sung Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

group included Wang Anshi, Ye Mengde and the so-called Jiangxi poets, all of whom were interested in striking style.[4]

In the Jin dynasty, the age to succeed the Northern Song, the literati continued to evaluate and participate in the critical tradition. Wang Ruoxu was considered to be the foremost critic of the Jin period and as such his writings are invaluable in the study of this dynasty. His *Hunan shihua* 滹南詩話 (*Talks on Poetry from South of the River Hu*) is a mine of information on the reaction of Wang, and to a certain degree also his contemporaries, to the poetry of the Tang, Northern Song and Jin periods and the traditional debates surrounding poetic practice which had been a staple of traditional culture since time immemorial. Wang himself considers the issues which had so engaged his predecessors such as the function of poetry and the need for personal expression as well as the disparity between worthwhile content and the type of language utilized in its expression.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a preliminary examination of Wang Ruoxu's critical views on poetry as illustrated in his *Hunan shihua*. The existence of this *shihua* (the only such text to remain from this period) offers us a window into the way in which poetry criticism was to develop in the later part of the Jin dynasty and allows us to deepen our understanding of the cultural situation in this fascinating period in Chinese history. It can also provide further insight into the way in which the critical tradition continued to develop in the north of China, thus enhancing our understanding of poetry criticism in later dynasties.

The Jin dynasty origins of and influence on *sanqu* poetry, the form which was to dominate in the Yuan period, as well as on the development of drama has been well documented by such scholars as Stephen West, Wilt Idema and William Dolby.[5]

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[4] For detailed studies of the history of Chinese literary thought, see James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); James J. Y. Liu, *Language – Paradox – Poetics: A Chinese Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992).

[5] For a detailed examination of the Jin origins of various forms of Chinese drama see Stephen H. West, *Vaudeville and Narrative: Aspects of Chin Theatre* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1977). See also William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama* (London: Paul Elek, 1976), pp. 14 - 40; Wilt Idema & Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater, 1100 – 1450: A Sourcebook* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1982), pp. 83 - 87; J. I.

However, until more study is made of the development of critical interpretation as it relates to *shi* poetry in the Jin dynasty it will not be possible to assess the degree to which Jin poetics influenced the subsequent development of both the *shi* form and poetry criticism in the Yuan and later periods. Without an understanding of the discussion surrounding poetry in the Jin dynasty, we cannot have a complete picture of the cultural situation during this time, nor can we hope to accurately assess the degree to which the Jin period influenced poetry and poetry criticism, and more broadly literary culture, in the dynasties to follow.

As Naomi Standen notes, the majority of studies on the non-Chinese dynasties use the concept of sinicization as the framework for their analyses.[6] Their focus is on the degree to which the conquering group, in this case the Jurchens, were influenced by and ultimately adopted traditional Chinese cultural practices. As Standen points out, one of the limitations of the sinicization approach is that it posits a hierarchical view of cultures with the influence flowing from the higher culture (the Chinese) to the lower one (in this instance the Jurchen). Since this approach does not allow for the possibility of a reciprocal flow of influence, it necessarily precludes questions about the way in which foreign rule impacted upon Chinese society. Therefore the way in which the conquering group influenced the culture of the native Chinese population whom they governed has not met with the same interest.[7] The study of Wang Ruoxu's critical writings allows us to examine to some extent the reciprocal flow of influence and as such can give us some insight into the way in which the unorthodox situation of non-Chinese rule impacted upon the practices of the ethnically Han Chinese literati, in particular their critical interpretation of poetry. In my study, I do not focus on the degree to which the Jurchen aristocracy participated in the Chinese literati tradition of poetry composition and

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Crump, *Chinese Theater in the Day of Kublai Khan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1990), pp. 3 – 30.

[6] See for example Jing-shen Tao, *The Jurchen in Twelfth Century China: A Study of Sinicization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976).

[7] Naomi Standen, "Alien Regimes and Border States" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40.1 (1997), pp. 75 – 76. Pamela Crossley points out the fundamental flaw in sinicization theory is that being "sinicized" means becoming like the Chinese, but since Chinese culture has developed in part as a result of interaction with aboriginal and border peoples, a "pure" Chinese culture does not even exist. The Chinese were, and are, in fact simply those who had been sinicized at an earlier date. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Thinking About Ethnicity in Early Modern China" *Late Imperial China* 11.1 (1990), p. 2.

appreciation with a view to examining the way in which they became ever more "sinicized." Rather, I attempt to examine the way in which being under foreign occupation influenced the interpretive practices of the Han Chinese literati, in particular of one figure, Wang Ruoxu.

The first chapter of this thesis will provide background information concerning the Jin dynasty and Wang Ruoxu's biographical details. The main tenets of Wang's critical beliefs concerning poetry will be outlined in the second chapter with close reference to his comments in the *Hunan shihua*. The third chapter will consider Wang's preoccupation with linguistic details and his vehement opposition to the poetic style of Northern Song poet Huang Tingjian. The fourth chapter seeks to examine Wang's own poetry in light of his critical statements and to assess the degree to which they support or contradict these statements. The concluding chapter considers the political, social and cultural influences upon Wang and the degree of influence they exerted on his critical views.

This thesis seeks to illustrate the concepts most important to Wang Ruoxu and the considerable disdain he felt for the poetic style of Northern Song literatus Huang Tingjian, whom he blamed for a decline in the poetic tradition. It suggests that Wang's own poetry, while generally supporting the statements he makes in his *shihua* criticism, does not exhibit the same degree of extremity. In seeking to explain the polemic nature of Wang Ruoxu's *shihua* comments, this thesis suggests that Wang's firm, sustained arguments, which focus on Confucian values rather than solely on aesthetic ideals, demonstrate the considerable extent to which Wang was influenced by the cultural and intellectual circumstances in which he lived and not merely by aesthetic taste alone.

# Chapter One

## The Jin Dynasty and its Foremost Critic

This chapter will provide much of the background information required for an appreciation of the work of Wang Ruoxu. It will first consider the political and social history of the Jin before outlining the sources available for the study of this period. Through close references to the dynastic history and contemporary sources it will then provide a biography of Wang Ruoxu's life and works as well as detailing the studies to date of Wang's critical writings, especially his *Hunan shihua*.

### Historical Background

The Jin 金, or Golden, dynasty (1115 – 1234) was a polyethnic state founded to the south-east of modern-day Harbin by the Jurchen people. By a quirk of fate, this non-Chinese state was the first dynasty of China to become known in the West through Marco Polo's mention of a "gold king," the title given to the Jurchen ruler by the Mongols.[1] The Jurchen (Nuzhen 女眞 and later Nuzhi 女直 in Chinese sources, Jūrcid in Mongolian and Jūrčā in Persian) were a Tungusic people who originated in the area of Manchuria. They were primarily semi-sedentary hunter-gatherers, with a small group converted to a sedentary agricultural lifestyle by the Khitan Liao 遼 (907 – 1125). While the states of Liao, Northern Song 北宋 (960 – 1127) and Bohai 渤海 (people of Korean descent in the Liaodong area between Korea and China) co-existed, the various Jurchen tribes were vassals of the state to which they were geographically closest. The Jurchen tribes who were for some considerable period of time nominal vassals of the Khitan Liao were

[1] Herbert Franke, "The Chin Dynasty" in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 216.

granted the right of self-government following the Liao defeat of Bohai in 926, and these various Jurchen tribes finally united under the leadership of Wanyan Aguda 完顏阿骨打 (r. 1115 – 1123) in the late eleventh century.[2]

In 1115 Aguda proclaimed himself emperor of a dynasty he called the Jin, most likely after the name of a river in the Manchurian homeland of the Jurchen people.[3] Incensed by this, the Liao emperor Tianzuo 天祚 (r. 1101 – 1125) led an army of some 700,000 men against the Jin but met with resounding defeat. Repeat battles fought over the next two years were no more successful and the Jurchen appropriated more Liao territory with each victory. Further, following each victory more Jurchen tribes as well as Khitans, Xia and other Liao subjects defected to the Jin, causing the Jin military to swell greatly in numbers.

Satisfied with their gains once they had captured the Liao eastern capital of Liaoyang 遼陽 and were in control of the whole of eastern Manchuria, the Jurchen sought to peacefully co-exist with their Khitan neighbours. They demanded huge portions of the Song tribute to Liao as well as more territory and diplomatic superiority.[4] All efforts toward peaceful relations ceased in 1121, however, when the Jurchen allied militarily with the Song dynasty to the south against the Liao. The position of the Jin also

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[2] For a study of the pre-dynastic Jurchen, see Herbert Franke, "The Forest Peoples of Manchuria: The Kitans and Jurchens" in Denis Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 400 - 423.

[3] The Anchuhu 按出虎 River (the modern-day Alachuke), meaning "golden" in the Jurchen tongue, was a tributary of the Sungari east of Harbin. This region was the homeland of the ruling Wanyan 完顏 clan and was where the Jin Supreme Capital (Shangjing 上京) was located close to the present town of Acheng 阿城 near Harbin. See Tan Qixiang 譚其驤 ed., *Zhongguo lishi dituji* 中国历史地图集 (*Collected Historical Maps of China*), vol. 6 (Shanghai: Zhonghua ditu xueshe, 1974 – 76), pp. 48 – 49.

[4] The Khitan had earlier observed the Uighur people grow wealthy as a result of the payments they extracted from the Tang dynasty in return for peaceful relations following the An Lushan rebellion. In 937 the Khitan soundly defeated the Song army and sixteen prefectures around the city of Yan were ceded to the Khitan as well as annual payments. When the Jin defeated the Liao, the Song agreed upon a treaty with the Jurchens in 1123 which transferred the annual payments of 200,000 ounces of silver and 300,000 ounces of silk formerly made to the Liao over to the Jin. Four further treaties between the Jin and Song would be made in 1126, 1141, 1165 and 1208. By the final treaty, payments had increased to 300,000 ounces each of silver and silk annually and in addition an agreement had been reached that the Song would refer to themselves as the younger brother and the Jin as the older, thus affording the Jin superior diplomatic status. For a detailed study of the five Song - Jin treaties, see Herbert Franke, "Treaties Between Sung and Chin" in Françoise Aubin, ed., *Études Song in Memoriam Étienne Bálazs*, 1st series, no. 1 (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1970), pp. 55 – 84.

continued to strengthen with regard to the Song. Treaty negotiations with the Song took place as the Song sought to manipulate their perceived opportunity to defeat the Liao and regain six key prefectures earlier lost to the Khitan. However, in 1122 Aguda marched against the Liao taking the southern part of the Liao state, including Yan 燕 (Beijing 北京), without Song assistance. This greatly improved the bargaining position of the Jin and resulted in a treaty which not only failed to see the return of all six prefectures in the Yan region to the Song, but also forced the Song to make huge annual payments to the Jin by way of compensation for lost taxation revenues from the areas which were returned. Tribute payments originally agreed to be sent to the Liao were also transferred to the Jin. By 1125 the Liao had been completely destroyed and the Jin possessed control over the entirety of Mongolia, Manchuria and the regions of China north of Hebei. The Song now found themselves facing an even more formidable adversary ruling over the northern half of China.

Realizing the weak state of the Song at this time, the second Jin emperor, Wuqimai 吳乞買 (Taizong 太宗, r. 1123 - 1135), declared war on the Song in 1125. The Jin soon occupied most of Shanxi and Hebei, then in 1126 they laid siege to the Song capital of Kaifeng 開封, forcing the Song court to flee south to Hangzhou 杭州. The Song managed to negotiate the withdrawal of the Jin from Kaifeng, but only by ceding even more territory and agreeing to pay enormous war indemnities in addition to providing a Song imperial prince as a hostage. This fragile peace was soon shattered when the Jurchen rulers discovered that the Song had tried to bribe Khitan officials to defect from the Jin. War resumed and this time in 1127 the Jin took Kaifeng and held the Song emperor Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1126 - 27), his father Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100 - 26), and numerous other imperial relatives and retainers as hostages in Manchuria. The enthroning of Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127 - 62) (formerly the Prince of Kang 康王) as the new emperor of Song was to mark the start of the Southern Song period.

By the 1140s, under the third Jin emperor Xizong 熙宗 (r. 1138 – 1150), the boundary between Jin and Song was fixed at the Huai river 淮河 and a relative peace had been established as the non-combative faction of the Song bureaucracy had come to power.

Peaceful relations were again threatened when Prince Hailing 海陵王 (r. 1150 – 1161), a brutal character with expansionistic ambitions, assassinated Xizong and usurped the throne. He centralized the Jin government to an unprecedented degree and moved the capital first to Acheng and then to Bianjing 汴京 (Kaifeng) from where he could more conveniently attack the Song, an activity in which he frequently indulged. His reign came to an abrupt end when he was assassinated by the peace-loving Shizong 世宗 (r. 1161 – 1190), the fifth Jin emperor.

Shizong's reign was the most peaceful of the Jin period and it was his reign that marked the cultural high-point of the Jin dynasty. Shizong was a benevolent ruler, under whom "...officials were assured of a post, society was at peace, household supplies were sufficient, and the granaries held a surplus. Seventeen to twenty people were executed per year at most.... Shizong was called a minor Yao or Shun."[5] However, Shizong's concern that the Jurchen were becoming too sinicized and losing their martial spirit caused him to make great efforts to revive native Jurchen culture. He moved the Jin capital back to Yan in 1185, imposed rules prohibiting the Jurchen from wearing Chinese dress and requiring them to maintain their hunting and riding skills as well as learn the Jurchen tongue. This only led to an increased friction between the Jurchen nobles and their Chinese subjects while at the same time relations began to deteriorate with the Mongolian tribes to the north.

The battles which inevitably ensued between 1195 and 1208 with both the Mongols to the north and the Song to the south, although won by the Jin, served only to reduce the size of the military and to place a severe strain on the imperial coffers. The sixth emperor, Zhangzong 章宗 (r. 1190 – 1209) could only watch his empire weaken as the Mongols gained in strength.

By 1206 Chinggis had succeeded in uniting the Mongol tribes and, having gained the

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[5] Tuo Tuo 脫脫 et al, eds., *Jinshi* 金史 (*Standard History of the Jin*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 28.256. Hereafter abbreviated to *JS*. Translation by Stephen H. West in his "Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972), pp. 11 - 12.

Khanate, from 1210 he started to lead raids into Jin territory. Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (r. 1213 – 1224) was forced to move the capital back to the safer, more southerly location of Bianjing in 1212 and by 1215 Yan had fallen to the Mongols. There was a peaceful hiatus for the next decade while the Mongols turned their attentions to conquering the west, but by 1227 they had returned to defeat the Xi Xia 西夏 (1032 – 1227), the immediate neighbours of the Jin. Between 1227 and 1233 the Mongols devoted themselves to a bloody campaign against the Jin which resulted in the siege and eventual capitulation of Bianjing in 1233. The last Jin emperor, Aizong 哀宗 (r. 1224 – 1234), fled to Caizhou 蔡州 and was pursued by the Mongols for the next year. His suicide in 1234 marked the end of the Jin dynasty.

As Tillman and West note, "[Jin] was a polyethnic state that ruled more of China and became more sinicized than any earlier dynasty founded by a foreign conqueror."[6] The Jurchen established a system of government that incorporated both Jurchen tribal customs and Chinese imperial bureaucracy. The earlier Tang dynasty system of government was simplified into a model with three main branches; the bureaucracy, the censorate and the military. This was to be the foundation of the governmental systems used by those dynasties to follow in China.

Contrary to the portrait painted of the Jin, especially by their Song neighbours to the south, they were not completely devoid of culture. The examination system founded in the Tang and vastly expanded under the Northern Song persisted into the Jin period and the Jurchen rulers and nobles rushed to educate themselves and their offspring in Chinese letters. Indeed, the Jin emperors from Hailing onwards were quite competent in the writing of *shi* 詩 and *ci* 詞 style poetry in Chinese. Zhangzong enjoyed a significant reputation for his achievements in the arts, a reputation which spread to the Southern Song and presumably gave rise to the unsubstantiated story that he was in fact the

[6] Hoyt Cleveland Tillman & Stephen H. West, "Introduction" in Tillman & West, eds., *China Under Jurchen Rule* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 1.

grandson of Huizong, the highly-cultured Northern Song emperor held captive by the Jin.[7]

## Research into Jin Dynasty China

Rule by foreign peoples was a matter of shame for the Chinese and the issue of dynastic legitimacy was never definitively resolved due to the curious situation of the co-existence of the Jin and the Southern Song. For both of these reasons, it was not until the Manchus, descendants of the Jurchens, established the Qing 清 dynasty (1644 – 1911) that studies of the Jin dynasty and its literature began. Qing scholars such as Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727 – 1814), Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733 – 1813) and Shi Guoqi 施國祁 (fl. 1808) produced intricate studies of the period and annotated the works of the Jin dynasty's most famous son, Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190 – 1257). This interest in the Jin was to die out again, however, when the Qing collapsed in 1911. Only a handful of scholars, Chinese or Western, worked on this period from then until the 1970s.

The Japanese and Russian interest in Manchuria in the early decades of this century led to the beginnings of Japanese and Western study of the Xi Xia, Liao and Jin periods (commonly known as the dynasties of conquest). A number of archaeological explorations took place at this time. The Chinese History Project initiated by Karl-August Wittfogel, then of Columbia University, was set up in 1939 with substantial funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. Work on the conquest dynasties continued at Columbia and then at the University of Washington in Seattle. 1949 saw the publication of Wittfogel and Feng Jiasheng's *History of Chinese Society, Liao (907 – 1125)* before funding ran out and Feng, who was also working on the Jin dynasty, returned to Asia.[8] The project then lay dormant until Herbert Franke took up a position as visiting scholar at the University of Washington in 1964 and was given the boxes of materials Feng had

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[7] This rumour is recorded by Southern Song literatus Zhou Mi 周密 (1232 – 1298) in his *Guixin zashi* 癸辛雜識 (*A Guixin Miscellany*). See Kōjirō Yoshikawa, *Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150 – 1650*), trans. J. T. Wixted (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 20.

[8] Karl A. Wittfogel & Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society, Liao (907 – 1125)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949).

accumulated.[9] There was thus renewed interest in the Jin Dynasty History Project and our knowledge of Jin dynasty China has increased considerably as a result.

Western and Japanese studies of the Jin have concentrated mainly on the political, social and economic history of the period with studies of the intellectual culture considerably fewer. Recently Chinese scholars have again become interested in the study of this period as the study of the literatures of China's ethnic minorities has come into vogue.

## Source Materials

Mention should be made of the primary sources available on the Jin dynasty. Study of the Jin period is hampered somewhat by the relative scarcity of materials in comparison to what remains regarding the Song, Yuan 元 (1260 – 1368), Ming 明 (1368 – 1644) and Qing. The turbulence of the times and the lack of interest on the part of future generations of Chinese account largely for this situation. The primary source of information is the *Jinshi* 金史 (*Standard History of the Jin*), the officially-commissioned history of the Jin dynasty. However, the usual shortcomings with regard to traditional Chinese historiographical practices apply also to the *Jinshi*, and moreover it should be borne in mind that due to the prolonged debate regarding legitimacy of succession, this history was not compiled until considerably after the fall of the Jin when documents were even less readily available.[10] The *Dajin guozhi* 大金國志 (*Records of the Great Jin*

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[9] Franke offers a detailed explanation of the Jin Dynasty History Project and subsequent study of the Jurchen Jin dynasty in the preface to Herbert Franke & Hok-lam Chan, *Studies on the Jurchens and the Chin Dynasty* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1997).

[10] A number of shortcomings in traditional Chinese historiographical methodology have been remarked upon. Beasley notes that as a result of Confucius' supposed connection with the earliest historical account, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, Chinese historiography came to develop a strong ethical function with the historian assuming the duty of moral interpretation through the expression of "praise and blame" as opposed to a purely objective assessment. Yang points out that this was further exacerbated by the notion of "appropriate concealment" in which the mistakes of men otherwise considered worthy were excluded from the account, either through the use of euphemistic language or else by simple omission. This notion of moral judgement further led to bias in the selection of materials. Beasley indicates that the purpose of official historiography was to maintain continuity and to provide officials with the information necessary to govern and that the majority of official historical writings were written by officials with other officials as the intended audience. He also makes the interesting observation that there was a tendency in historical writing to collect and string together anecdotes to do with historical figures and events as a result of the practice of using historical precedents as a form of persuasion in philosophical discussions. A final

*State*) is another valuable source of information, both historical and biographical. We are also fortunate in that a handful of *biji* 筆集 writings[11] and literary collections by individual writers are still extant, for example Yuan Haowen's *Yuan Yishan xiansheng wenji* 元遺山先生文集 (*Collected Writings of Yuan Yishan*) and *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集 (*Anthology of the Central Plains and Rivers*), Zhao Bingwen's 趙秉文 (1159 – 1232) *Xian Xian laoren fushui wenji* 閑閑老人滏水文集 (*Collected Writings of the Leisured Old Man of the River Fu*) as well as Liu Qi's 劉祁 (1203 – 1250) *Guiqian zhi* 歸潛志 (*Record of a Return to Obscurity*) and Wang Ruoxu's *Hunan yilao ji* 滹南遺老集 (*Collection of the Remnant Old Chap from South of the River Hu*).

## Biographical Information

Although many details are missing, we can recreate a basic outline of the life of Jin dynasty literatus Wang Ruoxu from a range of sources, primarily his official biography in the *Jinshi*, Yuan Haowen's *Zhongzhou ji*, the *Dajin guoshi* and Liu Qi's memoir *Guiqian zhi*.

Wang Ruoxu's style name (*zi* 字) was Congzhi 從之 and his pen name was Yongfu 慵夫, meaning 'Indolent Chap'. Later in life he gave himself the alternative sobriquet of Hunan yilao 滹南遺老 (Remnant Old Chap from South of the [River] Hu). Wang himself explains the origins of his pen name Yongfu in the following poem entitled *Yongfu zihao* 慵夫自號 (*Naming Myself Indolent Chap*):

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observation made by Gardiner is that in the case of the official histories, the dynastic framework in which the historian was working distorted his view and caused him to interpret events during the period of disorder in which his own dynasty came to power solely from the point of view of the founder of that dynasty. However, it should be borne in mind that these shortcomings are not evident only in traditional Chinese historiography and indeed, most of the above points have been true also of Western historiography at various points in the past. See W. G. Beasley, "Introduction" in W. G. Beasley & E. G. Pulleyblank, eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 1 – 9; Lien-sheng Yang, "The Organization of Chinese Official Historiography: Principles and Methods of the Standard Histories from the T'ang through the Ming Dynasty" in *Ibid.*, pp. 44 – 59; K. H. J. Gardiner, "Standard Histories, Han to Sui" in Donald D. Leslie, Colin Mackerras & Wang Gongwu, eds., *Essays on the Sources for Chinese History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 42 – 52.

[11] *Biji* 筆集, literally "random jottings," were a form of casual writing in which the author commented on a wide range of subject matter. Topics could range from comments on literature, politics and the interpretation of historical events to advice on flower arranging. These comments adhered to the aesthetic of randomness and casualness and were arranged only in broad categories. There are a number of sub-categories of *biji* writing, not least of which is the *shihua* ("talks on poetry").

The experiences of a lifetime float around in the twinkling of an eye,
And so I grasp hardship and bitterness, sending crimson to my face.
People of this age don't laugh when an indolent chap is clumsy,
It's a mistake that people nowadays get so little leisure.[12]

Wang's dates are generally thought to be 1174 – 1243, although this has been a matter of some debate among scholars in China in recent years. Zhou Huiquan 周惠泉 sums up this discussion and the various sources of evidence in his recent book *Jindai wenxue yanjiu*.[13] He points out that the majority of sources, including the *Dajin guozhi*, Wang E's preface to Ruoxu's collected works, Wang Ruoxu's own writings, and Qing dynasty scholar Shi Guoqi's scholarship, all support the above dates.

Born in Gaocheng 藁城 in the vicinity of modern-day Shijiazhuang 石家庄 city in Hebei province, the *Jinshi* describes Wang as a precocious child who was "gifted and likely among the literati in a former lifetime."[14] Following the death of his father, Wang was educated by his maternal uncle, Zhou Ang 周昂 (d. 1211).[15] Zhou was a well-known Confucian scholar and official and under his instruction Wang's skills soon began to develop. His adolescence seems to have been further stimulated by the companionship of his cousin, Zhou Siming 周嗣明 (d. 1211) who was renowned for his fondness for discussion of human nature and principle as well as for his integrity.[16] His association with Siming gave him admittance to the group of young 'rising star' literati such as Li Chunfu 李純甫 (1175 – 1231) and Wang Quan 王權 (fl. c. 1208).

In 1197, the second year of the Cheng'an 承安 period (1196 – 1200), Wang passed the imperial civil service examinations and was granted his Presented Scholar (*jinshi* 進士)

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[12] Xue Ruizhao 薛瑞兆 & Guo Mingzhi 郭明志, eds., *Quan jinshi* 全金詩 (*Complete Jin Dynasty Poems*) (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1995), 86.150.
[13] Zhou Huiquan 周惠泉, *Jindai wenxue yanjiu* 金代文學研究 (*Studies on the Literature of the Jin Dynasty*) (Taibei: Wenlu chubanshe, 2000), pp. 165 – 167.
[14] *JS*, 126.2737.
[15] For biographical information on Zhou Ang, see *JS* 126.2730 and Yuan Haowen 元好問, comp., *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集 (*Anthology of the Central Plains*) (Taibei: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 4.167. Hereafter *ZZJ*.
[16] See *ZZJ*, 4.167.

degree with specialization in the interpretation of the classics.[17] He immediately entered the civil service with his first position being one of compiler of the records of Fuzhou. He then progressed to be the magistrate first of Guancheng and then of Menshan.[18] He is reputed to have been a very effective official whose benevolence earned him the respect of those he governed and so caused them to attempt to prevent him from leaving when he was assigned to a new post. At some point Wang married and from his own poems we know that he had a number of children, although a poem entitled *Shi zi* 失子 (*Losing a Son*) tells us that at least three of those children died. The *Jinshi* gives the name of one son, Nu 怒.

Wang's outstanding performance earned him a position in the central government. He first entered the National History Bureau as a compiler, after which he was promoted into the Hanlin Academy as a scholar. He served as an envoy from the Jin to their western neighbours, the Xi Xia, people of whom he must have had some experience after two tenures not far distant from the Xi Xia kingdom. Successful completion of this role earned him the office of sub-prefect in charge of the military affairs of Sizhou 泗州 county, this time in close proximity to the Song empire to the south.

The start of the Zhengda 正大 period (1224 – 31) saw Wang compiling the *Veritable Records of Xuanzong* 宣宗實錄 together with another prominent Jin literatus, Lei Yuan 雷淵 (1184 - 1231), with whom Wang had many stylistic differences. The compilation of these records was, if we are to believe Liu Qi, an acrimonious affair at best.[19] We can glean some idea of how stubborn and persistent Wang must have been from the fact that he mostly succeeded in rewriting Liu's florid prose in his own plain style.

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[17] The *jinshi* or "Presented Scholar" degree was comparable to the academic doctorate in modern Western society and was bestowed upon those candidates who passed the highest level in the civil service recruitment exams. Those who obtained this degree were then qualified to seek appointment to government office.

[18] Fuzhou 鄜州 county was in modern-day Shaanxi province, about 100km from the border with the Tangut Xi Xia kingdom. Guancheng 管城 was in the county of Xinzheng in Henan province and Menshan 門山 was in Yichuan county of Shaanxi province, also only a little over 100 km from the Xi Xia border. See Tan Qixiang, ed., *Zhongguo lishi dituji*, pp. 52 – 53 & 57 – 58.

[19] Liu Qi 劉祁, *Guiqian zhi* 歸潛志 (*Record of a Return to Retirement*), Congshu jicheng chubian edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 8.68. Hereafter abbreviated to *GQZ*.

Upon completion of the *Veritable Records* he was transferred to the position of magistrate of Pingliang prefecture, an area at the edge of modern-day Shaanxi and Ningxia Autonomous Region and a mere 100 or so kilometres from both the Xi Xia and the Song. He was not to remain there long, however, but was soon summoned back to court to become a Remonstrator of the Left.[20] His final official sinecure was as prefect of Yanzhou, although the *Jinshi* points out that, despite this title, Wang was in actuality an Academician in the Hanlin Academy.

We can gain some impression of Wang's character as he appeared to others from an entry in Liu Qi's memoir. He describes Wang as "appearing dignified and severe, and seeming unapproachable. Further, he was a happy sort and broke into a smile when drinking wine yet his manner was not vulgar."[21] Liu continues on to suggest that Wang also had a fondness for singing-girl entertainers and would not drink without their company. The biography of Wang in the *Zhongzhou ji* remarks on Wang's fondness for discussion and his ability during drinking parties to silence the generally disputative, loquacious Li Chunfu in a mere couple of sentences.[22]

With the start of the Tianxing 天興 period (1232 – 33) and Aizong's flight from the capital at Bianjing, Wang found himself firmly embroiled in the events surrounding the collapse of the Jin. Following Aizong's flight, the then governor of Bianjing, Cui Li 崔立 (d. 1234), rebelled. Believing that he was saving countless lives in the face of a Mongol rout, Cui Li slaughtered any officials who defied him and then surrendered the city to the Mongols, thus ending a horrific siege which had seen the population of Bianjing reach such a state of desperation that cannibalism was reported.[23] A group of

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[20] This position entailed remonstrating with the emperor over matters of policy and imperial conduct. The Left Office was the Department of State Affairs which comprised the ministries of Personnel, Revenue and Rites.

[21] *GQJ*, 9.77.

[22] *ZZJ*, 6.286.

[23] For an eye-witness account of this siege and an assessment of the causes leading up to the downfall of the Jin, see Wang E's 王鶚 (1190 – 1273) diary entitled *Runan yishi* 汝南遺事 (*The Forgotten Affairs of Runan*). This diary has been translated and annotated by Hok-lam Chan as *The Fall of the Jurchen Chin: Wang E's Memoir on Ts'ai-chou under the Mongol Siege (1233 – 1234)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993). It was not unreasonable for Cui Li to feel that he was saving many lives as during this period the Mongol invaders employed a policy of appeasement whereby towns under attack were offered the choice to

officials, led by Zhai Yi 翟奕 (fl. c.1230), fawned upon Cui and convinced him that a commemorative tablet should be erected to mark his meritorious deeds. Cui acquiesced and so Zhai Yi turned to the Secretariat in order to have the inscription composed. As the Jin literati strongly disapproved of Cui's actions none were eager to be involved in this affair.

Wang was originally charged with composing the memorial, but was loath to get involved. The *Jinshi* reports him as saying to his friend and then Division Chief of the Grand Secretariat Yuan Haowen, "Now I have been ordered to compose the memorial tablet, and if I don't comply then I will die. But if I [do] write it, my reputation will be dragged in the dirt, so dying for not doing it is better. However, for the time being I'll use reason and persuade them."[24] He initially held out and the job of composing was given to someone else, but finally Wang ended up editing the inscription which Yuan Haowen had ultimately had to write. Although the tablet was never actually erected, Yuan Haowen's reputation was considerably damaged and his character and morality have been called into question right up to the present day. Wang, to the contrary, does not seem to have met with any adverse effects as a result of his, albeit minor, role.[25]

Shortly after this incident, the Jin dynasty collapsed with the suicide of Aizong. Many literati were taken captive by the Mongols and then forcibly housed in the homes of important Mongol and turncoat Chinese grandees as writers-in-residence or tutors.[26] Wang, however, managed to escape in the guise of a commoner and fled back north to his

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surrender and open their gates to the Mongols whereupon very few would lose their lives. Towns which chose not to surrender would and did suffer wholesale slaughter.

[24] *JS*, 126.2737.

[25] Little information remains about the Cui Li debacle. Wang's biography is the only one in the *Jinshi* to mention the incident (even Cui Li's biography is silent on the subject) and the writings of both the men involved and spectators are strangely silent. Only Liu Qi chose to set out his side of the affair in his *biji* writings. This event caused much infighting among the literati and indeed, as previously noted, Yuan Haowen has been harshly judged throughout history for his role. The historians who compiled Wang Ruoxu's biography seem to have used the arguments from both camps, presumably in an effort to be as unbiased as possible. The first part is based on Yuan Haowen's epitaph for Wang entitled "Neihan Wanggong mubiao" 内翰王公墓表 (Funeral Inscription for Master Wang of the Hanlin Academy) and the second on Liu Qi's *Guiqian zhi*.

[26] For a study of the fate of the Jin literati following capture by the Mongols, see Makino Shuji 牧野修二, "Transformation of the *Shih-jen* in the Late Chin and Early Yuan," *Acta Asiatica* 45 (1983), pp. 1 – 26.

childhood home of Zhenyang 鎮陽 where he spent the rest of his life in retirement. In the final year of his life, Wang undertook a trip with Hun Yuan 渾源 (fl. c. 1243) and Liu Yu 劉郁 (fl. c.1243) to visit Taishan 泰山, a mountain of great importance in the Confucian tradition. When they arrived at Huangxian Peak they rested at the Cuimei Pavilion. There Wang said to his companions, "My whole life [has been spent] floating and sinking in the dust and dirt [i.e. in the trammels of official life], but I don't expect that in my twilight years I'll advance to the immortal realm. Certainly if my achievements in the end are as long-lasting as this mountain then my ambition will have been fulfilled."[27] He then sent away his companions before sitting down to rest on a stone, closing his eyes and passing away. He was sixty-nine years old.

Clearly there are many details of Wang's life, especially his later years, of which we know almost nothing. The wealth of information which must have existed in Wang's *biji* writings is now lost to us as his first literary collection, the *Yongfu ji* 慵夫集 (*Writings of an Indolent Chap*), did not survive longer than a century after his death. His second collection, the *Hunan yilao ji*, is still extant today and consists almost entirely of the critical writings for which Wang was so well known in his day.[28] The 45 chapters cover his views on prose, poetry, the classics and more. Stephen West divides them into four primary areas: classics; historical works; poetry and prose; and selections of Wang's own prose essays.[29]

## Previous Studies of the Critical Writings of Wang Ruoxu

A considerable amount of research has been done into Wang's writings on the classics and his contribution to Confucian learning during the Jin period. Chinese scholars such as Zhang Jian, Zheng Jingshi, Hu Chuanzhi, Zhang Jing, Gu Yisheng and Guo Shaoyu

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[27] *JS*, 126.2738.

[28] Wang is generally viewed as the leading critic of the Jin period along with Zhao Bingwen as the premier prose writer and Yuan Haowen as the poet par excellence.

[29] See West's entry "Wang Jo-hsü" in Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 867.

have all produced general introductory studies of Wang's work.[30] While there has not been such great interest among Western scholars, Stephen West and Peter K. Bol have both assessed Wang's scholarly writings, with Bol in particular examining Wang's views in relation to the Confucian tradition of the preceding Northern Song and the neo-Confucian doctrines making their way up from the Southern Song.[31] West outlines Wang's Confucian scholarship as follows:

> [Wang's] criticism of classical commentaries focuses on the forced interpretations of the Han Scholiasts and the overwrought extrapolations of the same canonical works by the Sung Neo-Confucianists; that is, he constantly takes the Han scholars to task for being too literalist with the text and the Sung commentators for being too imaginative in creating abstractions that range far beyond the basic meaning of the work."[32]

Liu Qi gives us a very brief outline of Wang's critical views when he says that Wang "...argued that composition has a form and that producing strange effects would not result in pleasure. When he wrote he only wanted to use everyday language, and moreover considered particles to be important. His scholarship was completely different from that of Li Chunfu and Li Tianying... He also wasn't happy with Sima Qian's *Shiji*, saying that [Sima] neglected the branches and dropped the joints in many places."[33]

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[30] Zhang Jian 張健, *Song Jin sijia wenxue piping yanjiu* 宋金四家文學批評研究 (*Studies on the Literary Criticism of Four Masters of the Song and Jin)* (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1975); Zheng Jingshi 鄭靖時, *Wang Ruoxu ji qi shiwen lun* 王若虛及其詩文論 (*Wang Ruoxu and his Poetry and Prose Criticism*) ( M.A. thesis, Guoli zhengzhi daxue, 1974); Hu Chuanzhi 胡传志, *Jindai wenxue yanjiu* 金代文学研究 (*Studies on Jin Dynasty Literature*) (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2000); Zhang Jing 张晶, *Liao Jin Yuan shige shilun* 辽金元诗歌史论 (*Discussions on the History of Poetry in the Liao, Jin and Yuan Dynasties*) (Jilin: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Gu Yisheng 顧易生 et al., *Song Jin Yuan wenxue piping shi* 宋金元文學批評史 (*A History of the Literary Criticism of the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996); Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (*A History of Chinese Literary Criticism*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979).

[31] Peter K. Bol, "Seeking Common Ground: Han Literati under Jurchen Rule" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987), pp. 512 – 520); West, Stephen H. "A Forgotten Classicist Looks at the Analects: Wang Jo hsu's *Lun-yu pien-huo*," in *International Symposium on Confucianism and the Modern World: Proceedings* (Taipei: International Symposium on Confucianism, 1988), pp. 993 – 1023; Stephen H. West, "Serendipity: A Little Note on Du Fu Texts in the Jin" (*T'ang Studies* 14 (1996), pp. 49 – 66); Stephen H. West, "Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972).

[32] West, "Wang Jo-hsü,", p. 867.

[33] *GQZ*, 8.67.

These lines are sufficient to illustrate the basic tenets of Wang's critical views on prose and poetry writing: use of plain, understandable language; grammatical accuracy; and attention to detail and clarity.

Less well-studied are Wang's views on the craft of poetry. Chapters thirty-eight to forty of the *Hunan yilao ji* consist of Wang's *Hunan shihua*, in which he critiques the styles of major poets (primarily from the Tang and Northern Song periods) as well as the work of poets of the Jin dynasty, with whom Wang was likely personally acquainted.[34] He is particularly concerned with a rejection of the Jiangxi school 江西派 of poetry founded by followers of Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045 – 1101) based on the techniques established by Huang.[35] By contrast Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036 – 1101) is held up as the poet who most embodies the properties sought by Wang.[36]

While a handful of Chinese scholars have examined the *Hunan shihua* and Wang's ideas on poetic technique - in the case of Zheng Jingshi and Zhang Jian in some considerable detail - Western scholars have not shown the same interest. The main English-language studies are John Timothy Wixted's article on Jin dynasty literary criticism which contains some limited discussion of Wang Ruoxu, the introductory material to Stephen West's Ph.D. thesis and a small section in Hsiao-ching Hsu's Ph.D. dissertation "Talks on Poetry (Shih-hua) As A Form of Sung Literary Criticism."[37] However, these are by no means comprehensive studies. The *Hunan shihua* is the only remaining *shihua* text from the Jin dynasty and thus must be considered, together with Liu Qi's *Guiqian zhi* and a handful of

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[34] Wang Ruoxu 王若虛, *Hunan Shihua* 滹南詩話 (*Talks on Poetry from South of the River Hu*), Congshu jicheng chubian edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985). Hereafter abbreviated to *HNSH*.

[35] Huang Tingjian's style name was Luzhi 魯直 and he chose the sobriquet of Shangu 山谷. He was a disciple of Su Shi and is considered the father of the *Jiangxi* school of poetry. Huang had a moderately successful political career and died in exile having fallen afoul of the Reformist clique led by Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021 – 1086). He left a sizable collection of poetry, approximately 2000 *shi* and 100 *ci* poems, in his *Shangu quanji* 山谷全集 (*Collected Works of Shangu*).

[36] Su Shi's style name was Zizhan 子瞻 and he gave himself the sobriquet of Dongpo 東坡. He had a very patchy political career as his outspoken opposition to the policies of the Reformists and criticisms of the emperor earned him repeated demotions and exiles to remote parts of the realm. Su excelled in literature, mastering all forms to a high degree and his writing style is generally described as unrestrained and expressive. He left a collection of approximately 2400 *shi* poems and 350 *ci* poems.

[37] John Timothy Wixted, "Some Chin Dynasty Issues in Literary Criticism" *Tamkang Review* 21.1 (1990), pp. 63 – 74; Hsiao-ching Hsu, "Talks on Poetry" (Shih-hua) As A Form of Sung Literary Criticism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991). For West, see above.

entries in the *biji* writings of several other Jin dynasty literati, the main source of information on poetic appreciation and composition in this little-studied period of Chinese history.

# Chapter Two

## The Conflict Between Content and Form

In this chapter we will examine the structure of the *Hunan shihua* and introduce some of the main points of importance to Wang Ruoxu in the composition of poetry. We will demonstrate that Wang considered the content of any poem to be of greater importance than its form, and that he sought spontaneous writing which comes from within the self as a direct and truthful response to the poet's experiences and feelings. We will also examine Wang Ruoxu's obvious distaste for the poetry of Huang Tingjian and the damage that he considers Huang's unusual theory of poetry to have done to the poetic tradition.

### The *Hunan shihua*

Wang Ruoxu's *Hunan shihua* comprises the thirty-ninth to forty-first chapters of his collected works, the *Hunan yilao ji*. This *shihua* consists of ninety entries on a range of topics. As is usual with *shihua* texts, these entries are informal and randomly arranged, whether as a reflection of their casual evolution over a lifetime or as a deliberate attempt to retain the original characteristics of a genre that developed from informal oral conversation.[1] There could perhaps be said to be a very loose chronological ordering with primarily Tang and pre-Tang poets in the first chapter, earlier Northern Song poets and Su Shi in the second and later Northern Song poets, especially Huang Tingjian, together with some Jin poets in the third. There are, however, a not insignificant number

[1] See Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, pp. 360 – 61.

of entries which do not fit into this chronological pattern, and so it has to be viewed as tentative at best.

Wang treats several dozen poets in his talks on poetry, but a brief glance through the entries makes it obvious that he focuses primarily on only a small handful. While Du Fu 杜甫 (712 – 770), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772 - 846), Wang Anshi and Jin dynasty poet Xiao Xian 蕭閒 (1107 – 1159) all receive similar levels of attention with approximately 8, 8, 6 and 7 entries respectively and Su Shi with quite considerably more, by far the most discussed poet is Huang Tingjian. Huang is the subject of almost double the number of entries (approximately 36) as the runner up, Su Shi, who has 19 entries. As Wang Ruoxu is implacably opposed to Huang's style of poetry, a topic which will be covered at length later in this chapter and in the next, this results in a rather negative slant to the *Hunan shihua* with Wang broaching most of his comments in the form of negative examples.

From the comments of his contemporary, Liu Qi, we can glean a good picture of the fundamental principles underlying Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism. In a passage in which Liu Qi discusses the differences between Wang and Li Chunfu's literary proclivities, Liu makes the following observations:

> Wang Ruoxu argued that composition had certain fundamental rules and found no pleasure in producing strange effects. When he put pen to paper he wished to employ the kind of language one could hear in one's home, and he went to particular pains with the 'helping words' (*zhuci* 助詞).[2] He was very different from the school of Li Zhichun 李之純 [Li Chunfu]. He once said, "Although Zhichun's talent is great, he likes creating daring sentences and startling phrases which are meaningless." He put Su Dongpo at the head of all the writers of the past.[3]

[2] *Zhuci* (lit. "helping words") are particles. They fall into one of three categories, the first being structural particles such as *de* 的, *de* 得 or *de* 地. The second category concerns verbal aspect and includes *zhe* 著, *le* 了 and *guo* 過, while the third is concerned with mood and includes for example *ma* 嗎 and *ne* 呢.
[3] *GQZ*, 8.67.

From this passage we can discern two principal areas to Wang's critical beliefs. The first is his preference for simple, plain language (the language used in the home) which is correctly used (his fondness for particles and thus grammar). The second is hinted at in Wang's quoted assessment of Li's work in which he claims that even though Li is a talented man, his writing is devoid of meaning. This would suggest that Wang is very much concerned with the content of writing and considers it of greater importance than daring writing techniques and unusual effects (form).

These concerns are indeed treated at length in the *Hunan shihua*. We learn that Wang considers the best poetry to be a spontaneous expression of one's inner emotions and personal experiences. He dislikes poetry written to a set theme simply for sake of writing and deplores the excessive displays of erudition and skill which he feels lead to substandard poetry of artificial sentiment. To Wang, poetry serves as a mirror to the mind by which it is written and as such rejects poetry which is heavy on ornament but light on substance (content). Content being of utmost importance in poetry, Wang stresses the need for natural reason to prevail and prefers that relatively plain, simple language be used in order not to overshadow the content of the poem. In this chapter and the next we will be concerned primarily with the two broad critical areas laid out by Liu Qi: the primacy of content in poetry writing and the necessity that language be utilized well in order to properly express that content.

When reading traditional Chinese literary criticism, it is often difficult to discern exactly what critical terms mean as their use varies among critics and even individual critics could be inconsistent in their use of terminology. The terms chosen to express theoretical ideas were often rather vague, for the simple reason that Chinese critics did not employ the analytical approach of their western counterparts, but rather preferred an impressionistic one. Neither did they have the same concern as western critics to formulate precise definitions.[4] This vagueness was compounded by the fact that these critics prefer to suggest ideas rather than argue them, so they tend to call attention to

[4] For further information see Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*; Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry From Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

different aspects of poetic practice but not provide concrete examples to clarify them. Indeed, metaphor and analogy were favoured ways of expressing ideas, but it is not uncommon for the analogy to be drawn between writing poetry, an abstract concept, and another abstract concept such as painting or the practice of Buddhism.[5] The *shihua* genre is composed of a number of short entries which can be anything from pithy and concise to casual and given to digression, but it is unusual for there to be a unifying theme or theory underlying those passages. Although Wang Ruoxu's *Hunan shihua* displays remarkable continuity and sustained discussion, these observations regarding vague terminology remain a feature of his writing.

## Content Supersedes Form

The suggestion that Wang was preoccupied with content as hinted at in Liu Qi's passage is confirmed by Wang himself in the second entry in his *shihua*. Wang quotes the words of his uncle, eminent scholar Zhou Ang, the man responsible for his education and who was, as Zhang Jing points out, unquestionably of great influence upon Wang.[6] In unconditionally and emphatically agreeing with these ideas (this entry concludes with the phrase "There is such truth in his argument!"), Wang is in effect adopting them as his own:

> When talking of poetry, my uncle once said that, "Meaning is the master of writing and words are the servants. When the master is strong and the servants are weak, there is no command the servants will not obey. People nowadays are so boastful of the servants that they [the servants] become defiant and difficult to control and so there are those who turn to the servants as master. This can be said to be the depths of their illness.[7]

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[5] For example, Su Shi compared the writing of poetry to painting. One such of his poems will be discussed later in this chapter. Southern Song critic Yan Yu 嚴羽 (c. 1195 – c. 1245) employed an extended Chan Buddhism analogy in his *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (*Canglang's Talks on Poetry*), Congshu jicheng chubian edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985). See Wai-lim Yip, "Yen Yü and the Poetic Theories in the Sung Dynasty" *Tamkang Review* 1.2 (1970), pp. 183 – 200.

[6] Zhang Jing, *Liao Jin Yuan shige shilun*, p. 139.

[7] *HNSH*, p. 2.

Here we can clearly see what Zhou, and following his influence Wang, consider to be the proper order of importance in writing: the words used to express an idea should be subordinate to the idea itself. He makes the point that words exist simply to express meaning and not for any purpose in themselves. It is when people become preoccupied with words and style that they lose sight of the idea they are trying to express, if indeed the idea was worth expressing at all. To Wang and Zhou, this is the malady affecting poetry in the current age.

As we have already noted, this concern with content over form was hardly a new one in the history of Chinese literature. From as far back as the fifth century B.C. the *Lunyu*, the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*) and the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Commentary of Zuo*) all discussed the distinction between substance or content (*zhi* 質) and pattern (*wen*). Later generations continued this debate, albeit using different terminology, with the *Daodejing* 道得經 (*The Way and its Power*) and *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Literary Selections*), for example, discussing much the same concepts but under the designations "sincerity (*shi* 實)" and "embellishment (*hua* 華)."[8] Wang was thus not breaking any new ground, but rather giving his own opinion in an age-old debate.

## Writing as a Direct Expression of the Self: *zide* and *qing*.

In another passage quoted in Zhou Ang's official *Jinshi* biography, Wang also learned from his uncle that polished, clever language covering an empty core may temporarily delight, but will not stand up to considered scrutiny. Zhou made the point, with which Wang repeatedly concurs, that no matter how good the surface of the poem (that is, the linguistic techniques used), if the content is lacking this cannot be disguised or overcome:

> A piece of literature which is clever on the outside but clumsy within is capable of startling all attending a banquet, but will not be suitable for one

[8] Stephen Owen defines these terms in the glossary to his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* and discusses their development in more detail in the first chapter, pp. 19 – 36. See also Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, pp. 18 – 20.

> sitting alone; it may obtain praise from the mouth but will not obtain the approval of the mind.[9]

Wang's focus on the content of a poem is further developed through his comments on what constitutes worthwhile content. Wang clearly feels that the primary criterion for good content is thought and feelings which come from within the poet himself (*zide* 自得) as a result of his experiences. *Zide*, literally "coming from within," is an important concept to him and one which he mentions in a number of passages. Wang prefers the poet to spontaneously react to his own feelings, thus producing honest, sincere thoughts from within himself. As he points out in the penultimate entry in the first chapter, it is writing in direct response to the emotions which is the very foundation of good poetry:

> Meng [Jiao (751 – 814)] is cold and Bai [Juyi] is vulgar and therefore numerous poets despise them. Yet when Zheng Hou assesses poetry, he feels that Jinggong [Wang Anshi], Su [Shi], Huang [Tingjian] and others cannot compare to these two and he says, "[Bai] Letian is like spring orioles in the shade of willows whereas [Meng] Dongye is like the roots of autumn grasses; each is a wonder of creation. Why is this? It's because the reality (*zhen* 眞) of grief and joy arise from the emotions (*qingxing* 情性)." This is the true principle of poetry.[10]

Here Wang Ruoxu is agreeing with Zheng Hou's assessment of what makes the poetry of two less appealing Tang poets so effective. Meng Jiao's poetry is quite morbid and he delighted in the use of cold imagery. Bai Juyi wrote in a very simple, plain style which reflected the everyday speech of common people and shunned poetic convention, thus his poetry was often not appreciated and earned the reputation of being coarse and vulgar.[11] However, the emotional content of both these poets' work is immediately apparent in their true portrayal of grief and joy, and for this reason both Zheng and Wang laud them. This passage is a good example of two related concepts central to Wang's critical

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[9] *JS*, 126.2730.
[10] *HNSH*, p. 6.
[11] These descriptive labels were borrowed from the criticism of Su Shi who said, "郊寒島瘦 ([Meng] Jiao is cold and [Jia] Dao is skinny)" and "元輕白俗 (Yuan [Zhen] is light and Bai [Juyi] is vulgar)."

thought, the first being the importance of human feeling (*qing* 情) and the second being the "true" (*zhen*) expression of that feeling.

It is interesting to note that unlike conventional Confucian thought, Wang focuses on human feeling and emotion (*qing*) as opposed to human nature (*xing* 性) as the corner-stone of his theory of poetry. We can gauge the strength of Wang's belief that human feeling was at the basis of all good poetry, and by extension all good literature, from the fact that he returns to this point in his critical writing on the classics also. As West has amply illustrated in his discussion of Wang's *Discrimination of the Analects* (*lunyu bianhuo* 論語辨惑), Wang dismissed all interpretations that made Confucius appear to be separate from mortal man and instead emphasized that human feeling and experience made him familiar to all. As West notes, Wang held a basic belief that "... human feeling, ordinary human experience, is coherent and objective enough to identify both the meaning of the classics and the social and historical contract that such a meaning engenders."[12] The following two statements from the *lunyu bianhuo* indicate the fundamental importance Wang ascribed to feelings and experience and thus reinforce the statements from his *shihua* currently under discussion:

> Why not simply measure [Confucius's] intent on the basis of human feeling (*renqing* 人情) and estimate it by whether or not it centers on the Way?[13]
>
> Now the words of the Sage are no more than human feeling (*renqing* 人情); this is why they are clear and easy to understand, why they center on the ordinary, and why they endure.[14]

Wang himself openly states that it was the practice of the poets of antiquity to write from within themselves and that this was what secured their fame, despite the fact that they expressed different ideas and did not employ the same forms. This would suggest that expressing one's innermost feelings is the most important principle in poetry-writing as

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[12] West, "A Forgotton Classicist," p. 1012.
[13] *Hunan yilao ji*, 3.17. Translation based on *Ibid.*, p. 1010. "蓋亦揆以人情約之中道乎。"
[14] *Hunan yilao ji*, 3.17. Translation based on *Ibid.*, p. 1010."聖人之言。亦人情而已。是以明白而易知。中庸而可久。"

far as Wang is concerned:

> The poets of antiquity, although differing in intent and not [agreeing on] following any one single form, necessarily all wrote what came from within themselves (*zide*). When their words conveyed meaning (*cida* 辭達) and their reasoning followed (*lishun* 理順), this was enough to bring them fame; how could there be rules of versification to fetter them?[15]

We can gain a deeper understanding of Wang's assertion about the best writing being an expression of emotions from within the poet through a passage in which Wang offers actual poems by way of example. An entry on page twenty-one of his *shihua* illustrates the way in which a poet's true emotion shines through and thus makes an expression seem genuine when he uses it. However, when another poet borrows his phrase but does not feel the same emotion that led to its creation, the phrase seems empty and out of place:

> Letian's poem "Gazing upon Qutang [Gorge]" 夜入瞿唐峽 says, "If you want to know how great is my sorrow, / It's as high as the Yanyu Mound." Xiao Xian's lyric poem "Sending off Gao Ziwen" 送高子文 says, "My happiness at returning is as high as the Yanyu Mound, / The thunderous stream billows and flows." It's probable that he [Xiao] didn't know where this image came from. But since Letian actually gazed upon Qutang, he thus was writing about what he had seen. [Xiao Xian] carelessly used [this image] but it wasn't appropriate.[16]

A brief glance at Bai Juyi's poem, the original from which Jin dynasty poet Xiao Xian[17] borrowed, makes it clear why Wang should consider Xiao's use of the image inappropriate and thus why it is important to write from experience so that the feeling will be genuine:

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[15] *HNSH*, p. 17.

[16] *HNSH*, p. 21.

[17] Xiao Xian laoren 蕭閒老人 (Old Man Who Whistles at Leisure) was the sobriquet of Cai Songnian 蔡松年 (1107 – 1159), style name Bojian 伯堅, who was the Prime Minister in the early days of the Jin dynasty. He was originally a Song subject, but living in Bianjing (Kaifeng) he soon found himself a subject of the Jin when they conquered the city. He was very well known for his lyric *ci* 詞 poetry. Of the six chapters which comprised his *ci*-poetry collection *Mingxiu ji* 明秀集 (*Collected Works of the Bright and Beautiful*), only three remain today. They are contained in Wu Xiji 吳熙載, comp., *Shandong haifeng Wu*

*At Night Entering Qutang Gorge*
Qutang is the most dangerous place in the world,
Truly so difficult to enter at night!
Its banks are like a pair of screens,
The sky an unfurled bolt of silk.
A contrary breeze startles up waves,
As pulling on the bamboo rope, quietly a boat comes along.
If you want to know how great is my melancholy,
It's as great as the cliffs of the Yanyu Mound.[18]

The Qutang gorge is one of the three famed Yangtze Gorges and is located in Sichuan province. The river is very fast flowing and turbulent at this point and the Yanyu Mound, a rocky promontory at the mouth of the gorge, was a navigational nightmare making passage through the gorge extremely hazardous. In his poem Bai [Letian] used a landmark famed for its danger and the number of lives it had taken, a landmark thus known as a symbol of sorrow, to emphasize the depths of his own sadness. The poem by Xiao Xian of which Wang disapproves is unfortunately no longer extant, but even from the two lines remaining to us in this extract and from Wang's comments it is obvious that this poem is one which is happy in tenor. The fact that Xiao should use a landmark of such physical power and danger to express the extent of his happiness does seem something of a non sequitur and so detracts from what he wishes to express. This is a good example of why Wang felt that good poetry could only be produced as an emotional reaction to one's own experiences. The Three Gorges region being part of the territory of the Southern Song, there is no possibility that Xiao could have visited it. In not having visited the gorge himself, he does not fully appreciate what it is like and this experience then cannot make its way into his poem giving it genuine emotion.

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*shi shilian an huike jiu jinren ji* 山東海豐吳氏石蓮盦集刻九金人集 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967), pp. 1151 - 1192. For Cai's official biography, see *JS*, 125.2715.

[18] See Wang Quan 王全, ed., *Quan Tangshi*全唐詩 (*Complete Tang Dynasty Poems*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 441.4915.

## Truthful Representation: *zhen*

Zhang Jing notes the importance given to the concept of "truth" (*zhen*) throughout Wang Ruoxu's poetry and prose criticism and makes the perceptive suggestion that there are in fact two aspects to Wang's conception of *zhen*; the true representation of internal emotion and the accurate representation of external things.[19] We have already encountered *zhen* in its first aspect, that of the true depiction of sincere inner emotion and have examined examples from Wang's poetry criticism.[20]

A passage on page twenty-one gives us an impression of the importance Wang attaches to sincerity of description, the second facet of *zhen*. The passage concerns poems by Xiao Xian and by Li Yu 李煜 (937 – 975) and the fact that the flowers which feature in their poems really are flowers and not an elaborate metaphor for women as was so often the case. Wang's principal comment on Xiao Xian's poem is the fact that it is clearly a representation of the true (*shi* 實) situation and Xiao is thus focusing on the very essence of the moment in question. That is to say, his writing exhibits *zhen*. Wang appears to be suggesting that this sincere depiction results in language so expressive of the poet's intent that the reader can be under no misapprehension that Xiao could be metaphorically referring to women:

> Xiao Xian's "Sent to Gaoli" 使高麗[21] lyric says, "Ill after wine I rely on flowers to cure my ailment." Everyone takes "flowers" to mean women but this is not the case. The outstanding aspect of this lyric is that it has the language of a lingering feeling of left-over fragrance and the gathering together of fresh sorrow. How could it also be about women?! When you examine the structure and language, it doesn't fit [this interpretation]. What he calls flowers truly are flowers. He says that someone has already left and that what he relies on to cure his hangover is simply this thing [i.e. flowers] and that's all. This must be something that truly happened at that time. [22]

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[19] Zhang Jing, *Liao Jin Yuan shige shilun*, p. 140.
[20] It should be noted here that this emphasis on *zhen* is not limited to Wang's *shihua* writings but can also be seen in other areas of his collection. Take, for example, his praise of Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365 – 427) *Guiqulaixici* 歸去來兮辭 (*Returning Home*) poem in the "Disputations on literature" section of his collected writings which asserts that "this [poem] is really a sincere piece of writing!"
[21] This poem is no longer extant.
[22] *HNSH*, p. 21.

Wang seeks to further explain his views on content and the truthful expression of the external in an entry which quotes a famous poem by Su Shi, the poet whom Wang is reputed to have placed above all others. In this poem Su speculates on the need for exact representation, suggesting that physical likeness is not what is important, but rather likeness of spirit. What a writer should attempt to depict is the very essence of the thing in question, not its external form:

> [Su] Dongpo said, "If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, / His understanding is nearly that of a child. / If when someone composes a poem it must be a certain poem, / He is definitely not a man who understands poetry." There are those who value painting for its likeness; if a painting isn't a [good] likeness, then it's as if it isn't a painting at all. Selecting a topic and composing a poem but not requiring that it be a certain poem – really what sort of words are these? So is Dongpo's argument wrong? I say one should discuss the wonder beyond formal likeness, but not lose sight of formal likeness [either]. Don't distress yourself about the topic, but neither should you neglect the topic. This is how it should be.[23]

Wang presumably quotes this poem to illustrate the concept of *zhen* when applied to external things. Wang certainly agrees with Su that a depiction of the internal, emotional elements of a scene are of greater importance than the physical realism. Indeed later in the same passage he continues Su's painting metaphor by pointing out that landscape painters cannot depict all the individual trees and rocks in a scene but have to rely on certain artistic effects to create an impression of these things, an observation that applies to poetry also. However, Wang does not seem fully comfortable with Su's assertion that the poet should pay no heed to topic when composing. Rather he suggests that Su's words should not be read too literally and advocates a middle road whereby the poet does give some thought to topic, but does not obsess about it. As a number of scholars have pointed out, this preference for the middle road is typical of Wang's criticism of other genres also.[24]

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[23] *HNSH*, pp. 8 – 9.

[24] See, for example, Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "Confucianism under the Chin and the Impact of Sung Confucian Tao-hsüeh" in Tillman & West, eds., *China Under Jurchen Rule*, p. 96.

We have to ask ourselves why Wang would choose to quote an idea with which he did not fully agree, but which he also did not wish to pick apart in order to make his point? It would seem likely that Wang composed this passage in order to ally himself with the literary theory of a great master, thereby lending some credence to his own writings. During the Northern Song period and beyond, Su Shi's literary skill met with enormous admiration and he was generally considered to be the foremost literati figure of the age. Su also met with considerable veneration in the Jin period, leading Yoshikawa to assert that Su Shi "was the spirit [*kami*] of civilization in the [Jin] dynasty."[25] Although Su did not leave behind any sustained theory of literature, some of his comments have been preserved in his and his contemporaries' writings and from those a theory of writing has been extrapolated and attributed to Su. While these ideas do undoubtedly represent the thought of Su Shi to some degree, it should be held in mind that it is the more striking of Su's statements which have been preserved and which attract the attention of scholars and so it is a somewhat skewed picture of Su's beliefs which has been handed down to us today.

As Wang's beliefs in large part agreed with those attributed by posterity to Su and as he was so impressed with Su's own literary output, Wang could not have chosen a better ally. With his emphasis on spontaneity and writing as a response to one's emotions, it is easy to see how Wang could be attracted to Su's writing style and theories, not to mention the fact that Su was so highly venerated among the Jin dynasty literati. As Hsu Hsiao-ching suggests in his dissertation *"Talks on Poetry" (Shih-hua) As A Form of Sung Literary Criticism*, "[o]bviously Wang's strong advocacy of Su Shih arose not only because of Su's free and unfettered style, but also because Su considered poetry a spontaneous expression of one's thoughts."[26]

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[25] Quoted in Tillman, "Confucianism under the Chin and the Impact of Sung Confucian Tao-hsüeh," p. 106.
[26] Hsu, *Talks on Poetry" (Shih-hua) As A Form of Sung Literary Criticism*, pp. 244 – 45.

## Spontaneity

In another entry, Wang again points to a passage by Su Shi to give credence to his own thoughts. He refers to the opening section of Su's *Preface to a First Southern Journey Collection* 南行前集敘 in which Su explains that skilled writers write not because of skills they have learned or because they specifically set out to write, but rather because they spontaneously react to the world around them and cannot help but express this:

> The writers of earlier times excelled not in the skill of being able to write, but in the skill of being unable not to write. Mountains and rivers produce clouds and mists, and bushes and trees produce flowers and fruits. Their inner fullness and luxuriance are manifested on the outside. Even if they did not want to have such manifestation, would that be possible? Ever since I was young, I have heard my father discuss literature, considering that the ancient sages composed because they could not but do so. Therefore my younger brother Che 轍 (1039 – 1112) and I have written a great deal, but have never ventured to set our intentions on composition.[27]

It is easy to see how this passage fits in with Wang Ruoxu's belief that writing should be a spontaneous manifestation of feelings and not a laboured attempt to write. It follows that if Wang felt that writing should be a spontaneous expression from within the self, he should also feel that such writing need not be explained and that its fine qualities need not be elucidated but should speak for themselves. In an early passage in his *shihua*, Wang comments on the reactions of various critics to a famed couplet by Jin 晉 dynasty (265 – 420) poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385 – 433) which reads, "The banks of the pond are flourishing with spring grasses, / And the garden willows have changed into singing birds."[28]

> Xie Lingyun saw Huilian in a dream and came up with the line, "The banks of the pond are flourishing with spring grasses" with divine assistance. The *Stone Forest Poetry Talks* says that "many of this generation don't understand the craft of these words and that the special thing about them is that they don't try too hard. When he [i.e. Xie] unexpectedly came across a scene, he availed himself of it to create a composition and therefore it was

[27] Kong Fanli 孔凡禮, comp., *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 (*Collected Writings of Su Shi*), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), p. 323.
[28] These lines are from a poem entitled "Deng chishang lou" 登池上樓 (Climbing the Tower by the Pond).

not something ordinary feelings could have produced."[29] Lengzhai 冷齋 [Hui Hong 惠洪 (1071 – 1128)] said, "When the ancients had an idea they wanted to express, it was manifested in their feelings and lodged in lines of poetry. Lord Xie was always happy to see Huilian, but when he met him in a dream, they should have discussed ideas, not got bogged down with poetic lines." Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092 – 1159) said, "Xie Lingyun was always very crafted and so this line's achieving naturalness was therefore very strange." Tian Chengjun 田承君 (940 – 1003) said, "This was when he got up from his illness and suddenly saw this scene and found it made him happy. He was able to write it down and therefore it was precious to him." I say fine words born of heaven don't depend on people's justification. Even if this is not so, you could give a hundred explanations but what good would they do? Li Yuanfu 李元膚[30] was constantly seeking to understand it, but in the end he couldn't see the beauty of this line, and this actually happens to be my opinion also. Master Xie's boasted that he preserved the style of the two Jin dynasties, and later generations were seduced by his words and didn't dare to refute him.[31] Therefore, it's fitting that they should have such difficulties of this magnitude.[32]

Wang shows us how critics can spend generations arguing about what makes a good line so great, even if it is really just an ordinary line which, as Tian Chengjun suggests, simply meant something to the poet himself. He seems to be suggesting that it is not really the poetry lines which have caught the attention of the critics but rather the fact that these lines have been discussed by other critics and for this reason it is assumed that there must be something special about them.

## The Decline of the Poetic Tradition: Huang Tingjian and the Jiangxi Poets

In the above passage it is apparent that Wang Ruoxu detects a deterioration from the age of the grand masters in the quality of not only poetry writing but also poetry appreciation. This is evidenced in his claims that "fine words…don't depend on people's

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[29] The *Stone Forest Poetry Talks* (*Shilin shihua* 石林詩話) were by Song dynasty literatus Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077 – 1148).

[30] Li Yuanfu was a literatus of the Northern Song dynasty. His dates are unknown but he was active in the period around 1094. See Qian Zhonglian 錢鍾連 et al, eds., *Zhongguo wenxue da cidian* 中國文學大辭典 (*Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese Literature*) (Shanghai: Cishu chubanshe, 1997), p.456.

[31] The two Jin dynasties mentioned here are the Western Jin 西晉 (265 - 316) and the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317 - 420).

[32] *HNSH*, p. 2.

justification," which suggests that he thinks little of attempts to understand and appreciate these lines made by various scholars over a period of some three centuries. Indeed Li Yuanfu, Wang's closest contemporary in this passage, receives the least respect from Wang Ruoxu. Wang dismisses Li as unable to reach any sort of understanding of these lines, not even the flawed understanding of earlier critics, implying that Li is determined to see beauty in these lines only because earlier critics have done so and not because his own appreciative skills tell him there is any such beauty.

In a different passage Wang again visits the above issue saying that "for the most part, what has been transmitted in *shihua* cannot be completely trusted. 'The banks of the pond are flourishing with spring grasses': what is there to be admired in this? But those who have praised this line give a hundred reasons [as to why it is good] without stopping."[33] Throughout the *Hunan shihua* we are left in no doubt that Wang does not consider the poets of his age and most of the poets of the former Northern Song dynasty to be of the same quality as those of earlier ages:

> My uncle, Master Zhou's, argument to me was excellent. He said, "As for the writing of the Song dynasty, when it reached Huang Tingjian it was already off-balance, but after Chen Houshan 陳後山 (1053 – 1101)[34] its corruptions could not be overcome.[35]

This is a pretty damning indictment of Song dynasty poetry after Su Shi. The assertion that the damage done by Huang Tingjian, Chen Houshan and their followers "could not be overcome" certainly seems to be tarring the poets of Wang's own dynasty with the same brush. Indeed, throughout the *Hunan shihua*, for the most part Jin dynasty poets

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[33] *HNSH*, p. 5.
[34] Chen Houshan was the pen name of Chen Shidao 陳師道 (style name Wuji 無己) (1052 – 1102). Chen was a native of Xuzhou in modern-day Jiangsu. His official career was unsuccessful, in no small measure due to the fact that he had an aversion to public life. He was later recognised as a model poet in the regulated verse form and was even labelled as one of four poets whose style was exceptional together with Tao Qian, Du Fu and Huang Tingjian.
[35] *HNSH*, p. 12.

are the recipients of criticism and disdain.[36]

Although he in no way restricts his criticism only to Huang Tingjian, it is abundantly clear from even a brief glance through Wang's *shihua* that he considers the *Jiangxi* school of poetry, and in particular its erstwhile founder Huang Tingjian, to be largely deserving of the blame for this situation. Many entries in this text deal with Huang Tingjian and the various defects in his writing, often in remarkably strident tones. From the following entry we can glean an impression of how passionately Wang disliked what Huang Tingjian stood for in poetry:

> When writing poetry, if [Huang] Luzhi achieved a good line, in the end he could not complete it with a good match [i.e. a second line]. If he achieved a couplet he was completely unable to produce a whole verse. If he did happen to achieve one, he didn't know who he could give it to. Have you ever seen a writer from antiquity like this?![37]

As is typical of Wang in many *shihua* passages, his tone is abrupt, pronouncing a judgement rather than merely stating an opinion. He leaves no room for discussion or disagreement. Throughout the previous chapter there have been numerous examples in which Wang writes in a strident tone. The forcefulness of Wang's comments is not unusual in the *shihua* genre. As Stephen Owen explains, *shihua* originally came to gain importance as a genre because they were the words of a great scholar speaking from his own vast wealth of experience and offering his wisdom. Owen remarks that "[t]he randomness (and often a stylized crankiness) in the best *shih-hua* [*shihua*] appeals to values in which words have worth because they are elicited by chance from an interesting person" and "writers were more often aggressive…in *shih-hua* [*shihua*] than in more formal genres because the intellectual force of the form is inseparable from its aesthetic force, and both depend upon the projection of a personality."[38] Indeed there can be little doubt that, as previously suggested, Wang felt the need to establish his position as a

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[36] For criticism of Xiao Xian see for example *HNSH*, pp. 20 & 21; of Zhang Jiucheng see p. 2; of Wang Tingyun 王庭筠 (1175 – 1202) see p. 16; of Zhu Qiaonian 朱喬年 (d. 1154) see p. 18; of Liu Yijun 劉伊君 (fl. 1175) see p. 20. There are a number of other examples in the *Hunan shihua*.
[37] *HNSH*, p. 17.
[38] Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 362.

leading scholar and this is reflected in his rather authoritative and pedantic writing style. This authoritarianism is further heightened by the sustained themes of discussion which run through Wang's work.

## Stealing the Foetus and Changing the Bones

While for the most part the preceding entry seems to be simply a sarcastic insult directed at Huang and asserting that Huang cannot write well or consistently, several other passages give us a greater insight into the reasons behind Wang's dislike of Huang. The most informative is a passage in which Wang lays out his concerns with Huang's style of poetry:

> [Huang] Shangu's poetry is unusual but not marvellous, precise but without breadth and freedom. He considers an ostentatious display of scholarship as fitting, and the transformation of the musty and stale as freshness. Moreover, the complete naturalness which flows forth from the centre of a man's being is deficient in him. This is why he vigorously pursues [Su] Dongpo but never catches up to him.[39]

In the first sentence, Wang gives his opinion that Huang's poetry is unusual, but not in an outstanding and positive way, and his writing is too crafted and lacking in freedom. The next sentence explains why this is: Huang's preference for displays of erudition in the form of allusions and clever references and his unique literary theory of trying to create something fresh and "new" from old, tired material. Another area in which Wang proclaims Huang to be lacking is in emotional content. He feels that Huang cannot focus on his own emotions and so is unable to compare to Su Shi, the poet Wang holds up as a model example of *zide* and *zhen*.

A further complaint Wang voiced about Huang Tingjian's poetry was that Huang focused only on his intellectual intention (*zhiyi* 指意) when writing and neglected the emotional realm. As Zheng Jingshi suggests, Wang felt that Huang neglected to bear in

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[39] *HNSH*, p. 12.

mind the final effect of his work and so was deficient in the emotional aspect, thus producing only strange and harsh effects.[40] Adele Rickett, however, would seem to disagree with this assessment. In her paper "Method and Intuition: The Poetic Theories of Huang T'ing-chien" she points out that in recorded conversations between Huang Tingjian and his contemporary Wang Zhifang 王直方 (c.1055 – c.1105), Huang does suggest that for a poem to be worth writing, one must have something to say. That is, if one does not have something worth expressing, one should not simply write a poem for the sake of it.[41] It surely stands to reason that to have something to express, one must have experienced an emotion to prompt that desire for expression and that this is what Huang means.

The idea that Huang Tingjian is a highly meticulous, crafted poet is certainly not a new one, and nor is Wang alone in his dislike of Huang's style. However, few held Huang in such low esteem and were as outspoken in opposition to his work as Wang Ruoxu. As Rickett points out, "[f]ew indeed were men like Wang Jo-hsü [Ruoxu]..., who considered Huang's theories a brake on creative effort and who criticized him in bitter terms."[42] For many, Huang was a skilled teacher and it was thought that through the intermediary of Huang's poetry, one could reach an understanding and appreciation of the earlier masters, particularly Du Fu. Indeed, Su Shi was not slow to praise his disciple for his unusual style.

The aspect of Huang's work that drew the most attention, both negative and positive, was his unique theory of "stealing the foetus and changing the bones" (*duotai huangu* 奪胎換骨), which refers to two techniques he developed and named using Buddhist terminology. Huang's style has been summarized as "creative imitation and deliberate

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[40] Zheng Jingshi, *Wang Ruoxu ji qi shiwen lun*, p. 51b.
[41] Adele Austin Rickett, "Method and Intuition: The Poetic Theories of Huang T'ing-chien" in Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches to Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 100. Rickett quotes an anecdote to this effect from *Wang Zhifang shihua* 王直方詩話 (*Wang Zhifang's Talks on Poetry*), p. 14: "Writing a poem is like making a dramatic performance. One must first set the stage, and that having been done, one must tell a proper joke; only then can the performance begin."
[42] Rickett, "Method and Intuition: The Poetic Theories of Huang T'ing-chien," p. 98.

unconventionality."[43] Huang felt that form was of primary importance in poetry and poets could learn to write good poetry only by studying the ancient masters and imitating their work, thus bringing new life to old talent. He felt that a poet could borrow the essential idea from another poem and re-work it, or he could borrow effective language and imagery from an old poem while applying it to his own meaning. To Huang, poetic inspiration was a limited source which had essentially already been used up by the early poets and so the only way to attain fresh ideas and language was to remodel what already existed. He felt that the goal of perfect naturalness could be reached through comprehensive study of the ancients. We can gain some understanding of Huang's ideas from a passage he himself wrote:

> Tu Fu's [Du Fu's] poetry and Han Yü's [Han Yu's] prose have not one word which is not drawn from another source. However, because later men were not well read, they said that Han and Tu wrote these words themselves. The ancients who could write well were able to mould the myriad things. When the writings of the ancients are put into literature they work like the alchemists' cinnabar pellet, which turns iron into gold.[44]

From this observation came Huang's theories of "*duotai*" (奪胎, stealing the foetus) and "*huangu*"(換骨, changing the bones). It is exceedingly difficult to present an exact picture of what Huang meant by these designations as Huang has left little in the way of critical writings, having concentrated on writing poetry itself rather than on writing about poetry. Despite the fact that the composition of *shihua* texts had become popular by his time, Huang did not leave such a text and so we have to depend upon comments he made in his personal correspondence and on quotations preserved by contemporary *shihua* authors to gain an understanding of his critical theories. A brief explanation of "*duotai huangu*" can be found in a passage quoted by Hui Hong 惠洪 (1071 – 1128) and attributed to Huang Tingjian:

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[43] Michael S. Duke, "Huang T'ing-chien" in Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 447.

[44] "Da Hong jufu shu 答洪駒父書." Translated by Stephen West, *Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature*, p. 25.

> The meaning of poetry is without limit, but man's talent is limited. Not even Tao Qian or Du Fu could attain the skill of seeking out unlimited meaning with limited talent. Thus not changing the meaning but creating one's own words with which to express it is called the method of changing the bone; to introduce one's own meaning but [to use the original words] to describe it is called the method of stealing the foetus."[45]

From this passage we are reminded that Huang Tingjian considered man's talent to be finite and so measures had to be taken to compensate for this. He advocated two techniques to be employed in writing poetry based on that of the ancients which the student of poetry has encountered through extensive study. The first is to take the meaning expressed by an earlier poet but to reject his words, finding one's own words in which to express that same meaning. The other is to borrow the words of an earlier poet but reject the idea to which he is giving voice when one has an idea of one's own to express. Thus, in borrowing from poets of the past, one is not stealing wholesale, but rather selecting only certain elements, either the idea or the language, and by adapting those elements to create one's own poem, giving new life to old works.

Clearly Wang Ruoxu was not convinced by Huang Tingjian's theory of "*duotai huangu*" and dismissed it in the following manner:

> [Huang] Luzhi discussed poetry he used the metaphors "stealing the foetus and changing the bones" and "touching iron and turning it into gold." The whole world knows these famous words. But [the way] I see it, this is simply a special form of plagiarism. Luzhi liked to be superior and was ashamed that his [poetry] came from poets before him. He therefore [used] these forced words and gave them his own private definition. Since he took from his predecessors, even though he added his own skill, in the end [his poems] were not worth much. Although this is so, things share similar principles When and men share similar outlooks, so in their words and ideas, how can they manage to completely avoid encroaching on each other? Now the writers of old from the start did not point this out. Those who were the same did not consider this objectionable and those who differed did not take this to be praiseworthy. They followed what they found for themselves and just did everything that was suitable and that was all. As for their marvellous

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[45] Hui Hong, *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話 (*Night Talks in the Cold Studio*) in Wang Dapeng 王大鵬 et al, eds., *Zhongguo lidai shihuaxuan* 中国历代诗话选 (*Selections from Historical Chinese 'Talks on Poetry'*) (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), p. 360.

> attainments, they did not simply depend on this [comparison with previous poets]. Therefore none of them fell short of being a famous master and each was transmitted to later generations. How can there be any need to employ Luzhi's ideas?[46]

The practice of imitating much-admired earlier poets was not a new one even in Huang's day and the concept of plagiarism did not meet with the same derision in pre-modern China as in Western culture. Nonetheless, Wang Ruoxu is sufficiently incensed by Huang's theory as to accuse it point-blank of being nothing but plagiarism with a fancy name. Given that imitating the styles of early masters was such an accepted but unspoken part of poetic tradition and originality was not held in such high esteem as in western literature, one has to wonder if Wang would have taken such issue with Huang Tingjian's borrowing from other poets had Huang's style not conflicted so fundamentally with Wang's stress on the necessity of giving sincere expression to genuine feeling.

Zhang Jian is justifiably critical of Wang Ruoxu's obvious bias against Huang Tingjian. As Zhang points out, regardless of how one feels about the poetry of Huang Tingjian, Huang did exert a considerable influence upon the Chinese poetic tradition and as such he does deserve his place in the history of Chinese poetry. Wang, however, holds such a biased view of Huang Tingjian that he refuses to see any worth in his work at all.[47] Wang's extreme views of Huang Tingjian's poetry will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

The final *shihua* entry for discussion in this chapter is one which gives a clue as to the overall aesthetic effect which Wang feels cannot be the product of borrowing from different poets and different styles. He refutes fellow Jin dynasty literatus Zhu Shaozhang's 朱少章 (d. 1154)[48] suggestion that Jiangxi poets utilize special effects from the Xikun school and succeed in achieving Du Fu's "seamless naturalness" (*hunquan*

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[46] *HNSH*, p. 17.
[47] Zhang Jian, *Liao Jin Yuan shige shilun*, p. 142.
[48] For biographical details and the remaining poetry by Zhu Shaozhang, see *ZZJ* 10.514 – 524.

渾全).[49] He clearly feels that this *hunquan* can only be achieved from within the poet himself, undoubtedly as a result of the presence of the principles mentioned above such as *zide* and *zhen*. Wang then continues on to quote critic Mao Pu's comments on the absurdity of Liu Yishu's *ci* poetry style which attempts to fuse the styles of two other poets, albeit great masters. It is again clearly apparent that the reader is supposed to understand that these styles are very different and their success lies in their expression of inner emotion rather than the external trappings used:

> Zhu Shaozhang discussed the Jiangxi poetic form as using the special effects of the Xikun form and creating Du Fu's state of seamless naturalness. But I say that using the special effects of the Xikun style one essentially cannot create Du Fu's seamless naturalness. And those who reach Du Fu's position moreover have no business with Xikun special effects. Now the above two cannot be connected together. Mao Pu criticised Liu Yishi's *ci* poems saying that "[he] takes Du Fu's flesh [i.e. form] and lays it on Su Shi's bones [i.e. substance]," and this is also like that.[50]

In this chapter we have established a basic outline of Wang Ruoxu's critical requirements for the writing of high quality poetry. Seeing poetry as an expression of human feeling (*qing*), an idea which basically accords with the traditional Confucian idea that poetry should be an expression of human nature, Wang expects poets to write from their own experience and the feelings they inspire (*zhen*). In this way, writing should come from within the self and allow a true rendition of those feelings (*zide*). If he writes as a sincere expression of feeling, then the poet should be able to attain a state of natural perfection (*hunquan*). The following chapter will look more specifically at Wang Ruoxu's linguistic requirements for good poetry and consider further Wang's preoccupation with Huang Tingjian and his unusual style of poetry.

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[49] The Xikun 西昆 style of poetry developed in the early eleventh century and was named after an anthology entitled the *Anthology of Poems Exchanged in the Xikun Archives* (*Xikun chouchangji* 西昆酬唱集). Xikun poems make heavy use of ornate language, abstruse allusions and parallelism. As this type of poetry developed as conscious imitation of Tang poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (c. 813 – c. 858), it makes considerable use of mythical allusion. Xikun style poetry met with little critical acclaim and soon fell into obscurity, although some later poets such as Wang Anshi did experiment with this form. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw some revival of Xikun style poetry and Qing critics saw it as a reaction to the heavy influence of the Jiangxi style.

[50] *HNSH*, p. 18.

# Chapter Three

## The Pitfalls of Language and Allusion

This chapter focuses on Wang's criticism of actual examples of Huang Tingjian's poetry as opposed to his poetic theory. It will be demonstrated that Wang disapproved of Huang's excessive use of allusion for a variety of reasons. It also explores Wang's disapproval of Buddhist-inspired techniques, ostensibly because they did not adhere to the principle of reason. Wang Ruoxu's great concern regarding the appropriate selection of vocabulary is also discussed. The chapter concludes with an examination of the responsibility of the reader as perceived by Wang and suggests that the ability of poetry to convey the poet's morality is of great interest to him.

### The Problems of Allusion

If we return to Liu Qi's evaluation of Wang Ruoxu's critical beliefs quoted on page 25, we will recall that Liu remarked upon Wang's distaste for the daring and startling and his preference for plain, prosaic language as well as his concern for the correct use of language. These issues of form and linguistic detail will be discussed in this chapter.

In a rather acerbic passage, Wang makes clear his disdain for what he sees as Huang Tingjian's elaborate imagery and excessive embellishment. He chooses to comment on one of Huang's best-known poems entitled *Answering Qian Mufu's*[1] *Poem on the Orangutang Hair Writing Brush* 和答錢穆父詠猩猩毛筆:

[1] Qian Mufu was the style name of Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲 (fl. 1082), a friend of Huang Tingjian.

Loving wine, he has a drunkard's soul,[2]
Able to speak, he has few important secrets.[3]
In his lifetime, how many pairs of clogs?[4]
After death, he leaves behind five cartloads of books.[5]
To see the brush, you must attend the Meeting of Princes,[6]
The accomplishments of which are recorded in the Stone Channel Library.[7]
With his plucked hair, one *can* save the world,[8]
A means to politely refute Yang Zhu.[9]

This poem, as is typical of Huang Tingjian, is replete with allusions. Without an understanding of the references cited, it would be difficult to extrapolate any significant meaning. However, once the reader can make some sense of the allusive content, he must surely be impressed at Huang's dexterity in tying together these allusions and succeeding in creating a magnificent display of wit and intellect. Indeed Huang's skilful manipulation of allusion in this poem caused Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724 – 1805) to assert that it can be raised as "the standard for using allusion."[10]

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[2] An allusion to Jin dynasty (265 – 420) writer Chang Qu's 常璩 *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志 which says that hunters make use of orangutangs' fondness for both wine and clogs in their attempts to catch them.
[3] The *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) claims that orangutangs have the ability to speak, but their fondness for wine deprives them of the ability to speak clearly so that in the end they do not differ from other animals.
[4] An allusion to the biography of Ruan Fu 阮孚 of the Jin dynasty (265 – 420), a man famous for his love of clogs. A visitor supposedly saw him attempting to wax his own clogs and exclaimed, "I wonder how many pairs of clogs one could wear in one's lifetime?" See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu* 晉書 (*Standard History of the Jin*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 49.1364.
[5] This refers to a story in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 about Hui Shi 惠施 who was deeply concerned with intellect but lacking in ideas to go with that intellect. When he tried to change the attitude of the rhetoricians and create a more magnanimous atmosphere, the sayings he used were quite absurd. The part of this story from which the allusion is taken is as follows: "Hui Shi was a man of many devices and his writings would fill five carriages. But his doctrines were jumbled and perverse and his words wide of the mark." Translated by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 374.
[6] The *Jizhong Zhoushu* tells of a meeting of princes from within and outwith the realm.
[7] The "stone channel library" (*shi qu* 石渠) comes from Ban Gu's "Xi Du Fu 西都賦" (Rhyme-prose of the Western Capital) which contains the line "*Shi qu* is the place where ancient books and records are collected."
[8] An allusion to the *Mencius* passage in which the sage asserts that even if Yang Zhu 楊朱 (440 – 360 B.C.) could benefit the world by merely plucking a hair from his head he would not do so. Little is known of Yang Zhu's life except that Mencius claimed he led a hedonistic and selfish existence. He felt that life consists of a wealth of potential pleasures which pass by and that these pleasures should be accepted to enjoy life to the full.
[9] Lu Feikui 陸費逵 et al, eds., *Shangu quanji* 山谷全集 (*Collected Writings of [Huang] Shangu*), Sibu beiyao edition (Taibei: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 3.11ab. Also see Chen, pp. 105 – 106.
[10] Translated by Du Liang in "On the Strangeness of Huang Tingjian" *B.C. Asian Review* 6 (1992), p. 49.

The first couplet introduces the writing brush, the subject of the poem, in an indirect fashion. Huang first introduces the figure of the orangutang (the owner of the hair from which the brush is made) with allusions from the *Huayang guozhi* by Chang Qu of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317 – 420) and the *Liji* which establish the creature's supposed fondness for wine and the idiotic state to which this reduces it. The third line not only serves to expand upon the previous lines by giving additional information as to the character and eccentricities of the orangutang, but also allows Huang to introduce a philosophical component to his poem by suggesting that just as clogs wear out, so too life is transitory. Huang's skill must be appreciated as not only does he manage to link the idea of the shoes to the orangutang (the *Huayang guozhi* claims that in addition to drinking wine, orangutangs also like to wear clogs), but the character he alludes to in order to introduce the shoes, Ruan Fu, also happened to be legendary for his fondness of wine.

This highly polished linking of allusions both within single lines and within the poem as a whole continues throughout. Line five suggests the foreign origins of the brush which Qian Mufu may have procured at just such a "meeting of princes" while line six reminds us that the brush will be used to write more books. After mention of the brush itself and its usage and achievements (hollow achievements at best judging by the reference to Hui Shi's five cartloads of dubious words), the final couplet once again returns to the idea of the orangutang from whom the hair came.

By referring first allusively and then directly to Yang Zhu, the proponent of Egoism much reviled by Mencius, who asserted that even to save the world Yang would not pluck a single hair from his head, Huang reminds us of the drunken, idiotic behaviour of the orangutang which, like Yang Zhu, contributed nothing to the world while alive. However, Huang does not leave it at this, but rather manipulates his allusions of absurdity still further. By taking up this writing brush and participating in government, an action of which Yang would undoubtedly have disapproved, he certainly does refute Yang Zhu by repudiating what he stood for. However, the implication is that it does not actually do

any good but rather simply gives rise to more useless words as in the five cartloads of books.

Wang Ruoxu remains staunchly unimpressed by Huang's interlacing of allusions in this fine example of "stealing the foetus and changing the bones." He picks fault with a minor detail in one of the allusions and ends the passage by proclaiming in disgust that Huang's writing is merely a collection of riddles, a comment which he surely intends the reader to understand as referring to Huang's whole style and not this one poem:

> The "Orangutang Fur Brush" poem says, "After death five cartloads of books." Note that Zhuangzi's Hui Shi 惠施 was multi-faceted and his five cartloads of books, if they weren't books he had read, then they were books that he had written. It follows that [Huang] is borrowing [this allusion] to describe a brush that writes words, and this is simply self-promotion. Yet Lu Juren 呂居仁 [Lu Benzhong 本中 (fl. 1117)] praised [Huang's] poems on objects and his expressing the pattern of things in an unusual way (曲當其理). Isn't that so strange! "Only the one pair of shoes in his life" – the more you mull it over the coarser it gets, and he "plucked a hair to save the world" - it really is forced and laughable! The way I see it, this is a riddle for common philistines (俗子謎), so how can that be enough to be poetry?[11]

Wang is here concerned that Huang's poem does not make complete sense and his allusions create more questions than additional levels of meaning. He takes particular exception to the allusion to Hui Shi and the five cartload of books he left behind, presumably feeling it unacceptable to liken a monkey who contributed nothing to a man of considerable learning, albeit a man like Hui Shi who could not make effective use of that learning. He scorns Lu Benzhong, a major proponent of the Jiangxi school of poetry, who had expressed a liking for Huang's poetry of this sort with its warped way of expressing the principles of nature (曲當其理). Implicit in this passage is the suggestion that Huang goes to excess in his use of multiple allusions in a quest for startling, unusual displays of erudition.

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[11] *HNSH*, p. 16.

The discussion then descends into nit-picking as Wang refuses to see the humour implicit in Huang's poem and insists that as it does not make complete sense logically it is not good poetry. He seems to feel that in talking about the number of pairs of shoes the orangutang had the poem is becoming ever more vulgar. He finishes by suggesting that it is absurd even to think that a creature so coarse would offer a hair to save the world. He comments that the whole poem is so forced as to be laughable and denounces it as nothing more than a riddle to delight vulgar people (俗子謎).

A comment by fellow literatus Liu Qi makes it obvious that Liu and most probably other scholars of the time felt some of Wang's comments to be somewhat ridiculous in their pedantry. Liu recounts Wang's criticisms of this poem and then concludes with his own witty observation that, never mind the objections raised by Wang, how could the fur of an orangutang only be sufficient to make one single writing-brush? It is obvious from the passage in question that Liu is meaning this observation to be humorous in its irrelevance and is thus offering his observation as an ironic remark on Wang's comments.[12]

While this poem is admittedly extremely complex in its interweaving of allusions and perhaps does not make perfect, logical sense when viewed with a dispassionate eye, it seems that Wang is being rather churlish in refusing to recognize it for what it is: a clever show of intelligent wit.

## Buddhism vs. Reason (*li*)

Wang's desire for reason (li 理) to prevail in poetry is further evidenced in his ridicule of several other poets for the excesses of their imagery. In a different passage, Wang quotes couplets from the work of three poets and makes acerbic comments on what he perceives as logical inconsistencies ruining their poems. In a rare moment of levity, Wang recounts how these comments, when made at a party with friends, caused great amusement:

[12] See *GQZ*, 9.74 – 75.

> The language of poets is ingenious in conveying meaning and there is therefore nothing which cannot [be expressed]. However, taken to excess it then becomes a defect. Shangu's [poem] on Hui Chong's 惠崇 painting says, "I want to untie a skiff and return home, / But my host tells me that this is a painting." If his host didn't tell him then it ought to follow that he wouldn't have known! Wang Ziduan's 王子端 "Thicket Terrace" quatrain says, "I fiercely strike the railing and ask about destruction and renewal, / But the wild flowers and singing birds don't answer me." If they answered him, how strange that would be! The *Bamboo Village Poetry Talks* records a couplet by Fa Ju 法具 which says, "A traveller for half my life with endless regret, / I tell the plum blossoms and talk until morning." I don't know how [his regret] can be salved like this! Yesterday over wine I happened to talk of this and my guests were in convulsions of laughter.[13]

The first couplet decimated by Wang is from a quatrain by Huang Tingjian entitled *Five Poems on Zheng Fang's Painting Album* 題鄭防畫夾五首:

> In Hui Chong's[14] mists and rain, returning geese,
> Lead me to the Xiao and Xiang [rivers] by Dongting Lake.
> I want to hail a skiff and return home,
> But my host tells me that it is just a painting.[15]

This poem is clearly written to compliment a friend on his artwork and as such makes use of exaggeration. This does not seem unreasonable as this exaggeration had the well-intentioned aim of complimenting someone and there is no reason to think that this was not also apparent in Song and Jin dynasty China. It seems that Wang Ruoxu is simply refusing to recognize this. In the poem Huang Tingjian suggests that the picture is so lifelike that he loses himself in it, fancying himself to be standing by the rivers which drain into Dongting Lake and watching the geese overhead. The final line, however, shatters the illusion as Huang's friend reminds him that it is in fact only a picture. Wang takes issue with the insincerity implicit in the fact that in exaggerating, Huang misrepresents the true situation and thus not only neglects *li* but also commits violence against the principle of *zhen*. Huang may have found himself becoming absorbed in

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[13] *HNSH*, p. 16.
[14] Hui Chong was a Buddhist monk and the artist whose painting Huang Tingjian is admiring.
[15] *Shangu quanji*, 7.7a.

gazing at the painting but he certainly could not have forgotten the fact that it was a painting and not a real scene.

Chen Yongzheng points out in his annotations to this poem that it is a good example of the "Live Method" (*huofa* 活法) developed by Huang and the Jiangxi poets but perfected and made famous by Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127 – 1206), the Southern Song poet generally hailed as the last of the Jiangxi line.[16] The "live method" was greatly influenced by Chan Buddhist thought and was intended to shock a person into the realization that everything is transitory and merely an illusion, thus helping him to reach enlightenment. Poets sought to create an image and then suddenly destroy it in an effort to produce this effect. Often they also employed unexpected humour and wit to surprise the reader. This poem certainly seems to be an example of the "live method" with the first three lines calmly building up a scene and the fourth then destroying it. As Chen suggests, Wang Ruoxu either does not realize this technique is being employed or else refuses to recognize it.[17]

The second and third couplets cited also appear as though they could be employing the "live method," or at the very least are intentionally playing with the reader's senses to produce a particular effect. Almost all of Wang Tingyun's 王庭筠 [Wang Ziduan (1175 – 1202)] writings have been lost and his *Thicket Terrace* 叢臺絕句 quatrain is no exception. However, even from the couplet remaining to us we can observe that Wang Tingyun has built up to a crescendo a grand picture of his sadness and frustration (for this must certainly be the second couplet in the quatrain) and then proceeds to smash it with the futile observation that his grand gestures and ranting invoke no reaction in the flowers and birds around him. It seems unlikely that Wang Tingyun ever intended to suggest that the flowers or birds could be capable of listening and responding to his outburst. Rather, he must be intimating that in the grand scheme of things (that is, to the world around him

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[16] Chen Yongzheng 陳永正, ed., *Huang Tingjian shixuan* 黃庭堅詩選 (*Selected Poems of Huang Tingjian*) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shuju, 1983), p. 139.
[17] For a detailed discussion of the "live method," see J. D. Schmidt, *Yang Wanli* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), pp. 56 - 77.

as represented here by the flowers and birds), his troubles are but a trifling thing. If indeed Tingyun is employing a form of the "live method" then this last line could be interpreted as saying that his anguish is but an illusion in that it upsets only him and not the world around him. This would appear to be a reasonable assertion as we know from Wang Ruoxu's preface to one of his own poem sequences that he associated Wang Tingyun with writing in the Jiangxi style (see chapter four).

The quatrain by Fa Ju is one I have been unable to identify. There is certainly a degree of absurdity in talking to plum blossoms as they are unable to understand or reply, but without seeing the rest of the poem it is difficult to assess the impact and effectiveness of this couplet. Certainly it does not have such an immediate sense of "bursting the bubble" that the other two display, but it seems more than likely that this poem has been cited because it employs a technique similar to the other two.

In this passage Wang has selected a trio of couplets by authors from more than one period which appear to have Buddhist implications and to employ techniques favoured by the Jiangxi poets. It is doubtful to think that Wang was completely unaware of the influence Buddhist ideas had asserted on poets from the Northern Song period and thus was unable to recognize attempts at such techniques. Rather, Wang refuses to concede that these poets had any special effect in mind and deigns only to judge them from a purely logical standpoint, implying that because they do not make perfect sense they cannot therefore be good poetry. One rather feels that it is not the poetry itself to which Wang is objecting, but rather the very notion of the techniques they demonstrate.

## Huang Tingjian and the Folly of Trying Too Hard

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Wang's discussions of the linguistic and syntactical aspects of poetry writing focus on the work of Huang Tingjian. In addition to passages explicating the shortcomings in Huang's poetic theory in general terms, Wang indicates in detail a range of flaws in Huang's actual poetry, generally quoting offending

lines by way of example. He covers such problems as using excessively ambiguous allusions, utilizing allusions which are too distantly related to the poem to properly transmit the intended meaning, inappropriate choice of words or allusions, excessive embellishment and instances in which Huang employs a grammatically incorrect word or phrase.

Wang provides numerous examples in which Huang uses an allusion which is not in keeping with the tone or subject matter of his poem. In the following entry, Wang points out the disparity between grafting flowers,[18] the topic of Huang's poem entitled "Responding to Shihou's Grafted Flowers 和師厚接花", and the violent, forceful allusions he employs:

> "Grafting Flowers" says, "[Ran] Yong was originally a ploughman's son, / And Zhongyou was originally a rustic man. / Their advancing to the court and entering the inner apartments, / Came only by brandishing an axe." The words "*Hui jin*" are not appropriate and he is adopting such a vague metaphor.[19]

In quoting only the second half of this poem written by Huang Tingjian to his uncle Xie Shihou 謝師厚, Wang removes the context for the allusions and makes it considerably more difficult to appreciate Huang's technique in this poem replete with allusions. The first half of this poem contains the lines "With great skill attained from within the heart, / You graft flowers as if they have a spirit. / With their roots in ploughed soil, / And their colour like Luoyang spring." The poem opens by complimenting the innate talent and skill shown by Xie through the use of an allusion to the *Zhuangzi*. The phrase "attained from the heart" is a reference to the story of Wheelwright Pian who explains that he instinctively knows the pressure and techniques to use in his craft and that these are not

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[18] Huang Baohua 黃寶華 in his *Huang Tingjian xuanji* 黃庭堅選集 (*Selected Works of Huang Tingjian*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), pp. 42 - 43 suggests that "*jie* 接" here means the art of "grafting" (in the sense of *jiajie* 嫁接 ) flowers rather than merely picking flowers.
[19] *HNSH*, p 15.

learnable skills.[20] Luoyang spring in the fourth line is a well-established reference to the beautiful peonies which grow in the city of Luoyang.[21] The fifth line refers to Ran Yong 冉雍, a disciple of Confucius also known as Zhonggong 仲弓, whom Confucius admired greatly for his morality and virtue. Ran's biography in the *Shiji* gives considerable detail about his character and mentions that his father was a ploughman.[22] Zhongyou 仲由 in line six is another disciple of Confucius who is better known as Zilu 子路 and to whom the *Shiji* also attributes rustic origins.[23] The seventh line alludes to the *Lunyu* and generally refers to the development of greater breadth and depth of learning.[24] In the final line "*hui jin*揮斤" is an allusion to the *Zhuangzi* story of Carpenter Shi who could remove plaster from his friend's nose with a single whirl of his hatchet and thus essentially means spiritual power rather than violent physical action.[25]

It would seem, as Zheng suggests, that Wang is pointing out the futility of grand displays of classical learning if the poet then chooses allusions which are not really in keeping with the point he is attempting to make. He feels that allusions to events involving hatchets and axes are inappropriate when discussing such delicate work as grafting flowers. It is also probable that Wang wants the reader to understand that Huang cannot have had any personal experience of the feelings connected with grafting flowers when he was writing this poem and this has coloured his choice of image to the detriment of his

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[20] From the "Way of Heaven 天道" section of the *Zhuangzi*: "Wheelwright Pian said, '…When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel slides and won't take hold. But if they're too hard, it bites in and won't budge. Not too gentle, not too hard – you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. You can't put it into words, and yet there's a knack to it somehow. I can't teach it to my son, and he can't learn it form me.'" Translation by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 152 – 53.

[21] This phrase had been used by a great number of writers before Huang such as Bai Juyi in his "Liunian li chunri renri zuo 六年立春日人日作" and Shao Yong's 邵雍 (1011 – 1077) "Luoyang chun 洛陽春" series of eight quatrains.

[22] See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 617.2185.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] See the "*Xianjin pian* 先進篇" section of the *Lunyu* 論語.

[25] See the "*Xu Wugui* 徐無鬼" section of *Zhuangzi*: "Zhuangzi was accompanying a funeral when he passed by the grave of Huizi. Turning to his attendants, he said, "There was once a plasterer who, if he got a speck of mud on the tip of his nose no thicker than a fly's wing would get his friend Carpenter Shih to slice it off for him. Carpenter Shih, whirling his hatchet with a noise like the wind, would accept the assignment and proceed to slice, removing every bit of mud without injury to the nose, while the plasterer just stood there completely unperturbed…" Translation by Burton Watson, *Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 269.

poem. In other words, Huang is writing on a set theme rather than simply writing because he feels a certain emotion and cannot help but give expression to that emotion.[26] However, it would seem that Wang does not acknowledge the spiritual aspect of this allusion employed by Huang. As with the allusion to the *Zhuangzi* used in the first line of the poem, the focus is not really on the piece of equipment used, that is the axe and its violent nature, but rather on the intuitive skill used by Wheelwright Pian and Carpenter Shi. Since intuitive skill must surely also be necessary in the art of working with flowers this allusion can be seen as applicable to the theme of the poem and adds a successful spiritual dimension. It seems that Wang Ruoxu, in his eagerness to discredit Huang, is reading only the surface level of the *Zhuangzi* parables, which are indeed somewhat distant from the theme of the poem, and ignoring the spiritual dimension which to the contrary is very appropriate.

Another interesting example of the pitfalls involved in employing allusion refers to Huang Tingjian's well-known poem about the game of *weiqi*[27] entitled *Two Poems Presented to Ren Gongjian on Playing Weiqi* 奕棋二首呈任公漸:

> Chancing to have no state affairs and guests staying away,
> I sit on a mat and chat about military strategy while comparing the two sides.
> My spirit is like spider's silk roaming the azure sky,
> While my body is like the discarded shell of a cicada transformed into a withered branch.
> If I had Xiangdong's one eye I really would be willing to die,
> But when the world is equally divided I can still persevere.
> Who said people like us seem worried about time passing?
> The Shen constellation slants down and the moon sets yet we don't even notice![28]

As is his wont, Huang Tingjian has employed a number of allusions in this poem written to Ren Gongjian, a man we know to have been the magistrate of Ye 葉 County and

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[26] Zheng Jingshi, *Wang Ruoxu ji qi shiwen lun*, pp. 53ab.
[27] A Chinese game of strategy in which small pieces are put on the board to gain territory, commonly known in English by it's Japanese name of "Go."
[28] *Shangu quanji*, *waiji* 2.2b – 3a.

Huang's superior at the time. He is describing his thoughts when examining the two sides of a *weiqi* game and assessing the strategies used. In the second couplet, Huang describes the intense concentration of the *weiqi* player and the way his spirit seems to wander as he becomes absorbed in the game. The fourth line is an allusion to a parable in the Daoist text of the *Zhuangzi* in which Zhuangzi tells of Confucius meeting a hunchback who is highly skilled at catching cicadas with a sticky pole. The hunchback explains his ability by saying that his body becomes like a withered tree with his arms like gnarled branches as he sits extremely still and focuses only on catching cicadas. He says that "... not letting any of the other ten thousand things take the place of these cicada-wings – how can I help but succeed?"[29] Huang is using this famous allusion to say that the *weiqi* player is completely focused and absorbed in what he is doing.

The third couplet tells of the manoeuvres and skills needed in playing the game. If there is only one 'eye' in a territory (that is, if only one square is left empty in an area cordoned off in an attempt to gain territory) then the stones are dead and that territory is insecure and can easily be won back by the opponent. If, however, two 'eyes' exist then the stones are alive and thus the territory is completely secure and constitutes an advance toward victory. When he says "Xiangdong's one eye" 湘東一目 Huang is alluding to the story of Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508 – 554), the king of Xiangdong in the Liang dynasty (502 – 557) who had only one eye. Despite this handicap he was victorious in a war against the state of Western Wei, and so people laughed and said "Xiang Yu with his double-pupiled eye (重瞳) was still defeated at Wujiang; Xiangdong with his one eye, on the other hand, returned to Chi County."[30] The fourth couplet then concludes the poem with a comment on the unnoticed passage of time as the players are absorbed in the game; the stars disappear and the moon sinks below the horizon as morning comes and the players have played through the night.

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[29] See the "Mastering Life" section in the *Zhuangzi*. This story concludes with the following lines: "Confucius turned to his disciples and said, 'He keeps his will undivided and concentrates his spirit – that would serve to describe our hunchback gentleman here, would it not?'" Translation by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, pp. 199 – 200.

[30] See the "Yuandi ji 元帝紀" chapter of Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liangshu* 梁書 (*Standard History of Liang*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973).

As Chen Yongzheng points out in his annotations to this poem, Huang borrows the words from the Xiangdong story to introduce the characters "one eye (一目)" to describe the positioning of the *weiqi* pieces in the game.[31] Zheng Jingshi makes the interesting suggestion that Huang may also be using the name Xiangdong to represent one side (the eastern portion) of the *weiqi* board.[32] Both agree that Huang is not using this allusion for the story behind it, but simply because it happens to include the words "one eye." As Huang does not seem to be using this allusion to project any additional meaning or dimension to his poem, it does rather seem that his use of this allusion is purely gratuitous and intended simply to showcase the poet's learning. It is also to the incorporation of this allusion that Wang Ruoxu objects:

> "The Great Game of *Weiqi*" says, "If I had Xiangdong's one eye I really would be willing to die, / But when the world is equally divided I can still persevere." Taking Xiangdong's eye to represent an "eye" in chess is not very satisfactory. Moreover, what special dimension does this association bring [to the poem]? It doesn't, so how can it be understood?[33]

As Wang points out, what association is there between the game of *weiqi* and the fact that this man had only one eye? Indeed, the allusion to which Huang Tingjian refers has the opposite implication to the one he is trying to suggest in his poem in that Xiao Yi had one eye and was victorious whereas in the game of *weiqi* having only one eye leads to death. The sympathetic reader might feel that in using this allusion Huang Tingjian is trying to stimulate a sense that the game is a mental battle and hence he is employing an allusion to a battle which also contains words which can be used to describe the physical aspect of the game (that is, forming "eyes"). He does not intend the reader to consider the actual outcome of the battle in which Xiao Yi was involved, but rather aims simply to bring to the reader's mind the idea of "eyes." Wang, however, is staunch in his belief that this allusion does not add to the poem and does not properly fit, and that Huang is thus only succeeding in making his poem more difficult to understand.

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[31] Chen Yongzheng, ed., *Huang Tingjian shixuan*, pp. 18 – 19.
[32] Zheng Jingshi, *Wang Ruoxu ji qi shiwen lun*, pp. 53b – 54a.
[33] *HNSH*, p. 15.

Another instance in which Wang feels that Huang fails to achieve the correct tone as a result of his attempts at clever ingenuity is in a lyric (*ci*) poem to the tune *Washing Creek Sands* 浣溪沙:

> A new wife at the shore-head, eyebrows blackened in sadness,
> A daughter at the river bank, her eyes billows of Autumn,[34]
> Startled fish mistakenly recognize the sinking moon as a heavy hook.
>
> In a green bamboo sou'wester, nothing gets in his way,
> While under a green raincoat he rests for a time,
> As a driving wind blows rain, he turns round the prow of the boat.[35]

Wang comments upon this poem as follows:

> Shangu's lyric says, "A new wife at the shore-head, eyebrows blackened in sadness, / A daughter at the river bank, her eyes billows of Autumn." He himself said that it talks of mountain colours and shining water and rejects jade flesh and flowery appearance. It truly achieves the situation of an aged fishing family. Dongpo says this is such "unrestrained abandon!"[36] One could say that [he] is good at teasing. It's not suitable to connect this situation with the old fisherman.[37]

Wang appears to be of the opinion that despite his efforts to avoid conventional imagery, Huang has still created a scene too far from reality wherein an old fisherman, hardly someone who lives a glamorous life, has a beautiful young wife. Certainly this is what I assume he is referring to when he rejects Huang's suggestion that he has managed to avoid the imagery generally associated with the description of young women (such as jade flesh and flowers). This passage is also a further example of Wang's aforementioned concern with *li*.

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[34] "A new wife at the shore-head" (*Xinfu tantou* 新婦灘頭) and "a daughter at the river-bank" (*Nu'er pukou* 女兒浦口) are both place-names. Huang Tingjian skilfully incorporates the literal meanings of these place-names into his poem.

[35] Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋, ed, *Quan Songci* 全宋詞 (*Complete Song* Ci-*poems*)(Taibei: Minglun chubanshe, 1970), p. 398.

[36] The *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大辭典 defines *lanlang* (濫浪) as meaning "*fanglang wuju* 放浪無拘" which I translate as "unrestrained abandon."

[37] *HNSH*, p. 13.

Pointing out instances in which Huang Tingjian's unusual choice of imagery fails to suit the subject matter of his poem is a favourite sport of Wang Ruoxu and we see numerous examples in the *Hunan shihua*. The last such example I wish to discuss is a brief entry discussing a poem by Huang which incorporates allusions from the *Lunyu*, the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) and the *Taiping huanyuji* 太平寰宇記 (*Record of the World at Peace*) in the space of four lines. This poem is titled *On Boshi's*[38] *Painting of Yan Ziling Fishing on a Sandbank* 題伯時畫嚴子陵釣灘:

> Having been firm friends with Liu Wenshu his whole life,
> He still didn't dare to vanquish the three grandees.
> Being able to command the Han family is [a burden] as heavy as the nine tripods,
> While on the waves on the Tong River, a single thread in the wind.[39]

This poem discusses the historical background of the person depicted by Li Boshi in his painting. Unlike a number of his other poems on painting in which Huang describes how absorbed he becomes in the painting due to its incredible expressive powers (see, for example, page 51), this poem makes no mention of the actual painting, just of the character depicted in the painting. Yan Ziling 嚴子陵 was the style name of Yan Guang 嚴光, a fellow student of Liu Xiu 劉秀, the founder of the Eastern Han dynasty (25 – 220 A.D.) who was to become Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25 – 57 A.D.). It appears that after Liu rose to power, he remembered the help or advice that Yan gave him long before and sought to repay him by appointing him to the highest position in the government. Yan Guang, however, refused and chose instead to live in seclusion for the remainder of his life, fishing on the river Tong near his home. The *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Standard History of the Latter Han*) records Yan as responding to Liu's request by saying, "In the past when Emperor Yao was seeking virtuous people, Chao Fu [a famous recluse]

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[38] Boshi 伯時 was the style name of Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049 – 1106), a Northern Song literatus well-known for his painting which, according to Li's official biography, absorbed the style of Du Fu. See Tuo Tuo 脫脫 et al., eds., *Songshi* 宋史 (*Standard History of the Song*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 444.13125.

[39] *Shangu quanji*, 9.3a.

washed out his ears [i.e. refused to listen]. If a scholar has always had ambition, then why would [it have to] reach the stage of forcing him [to serve in government]?"[40]

Declining to participate in official life for lack of worldly ambition and preferring instead to live the life of a recluse was seen as a very moral decision and such people were held up as examples of great integrity. Huang points out in this poem that Yan was a man of such integrity that he would not accept Liu's offer. As Chen Yongzheng reminds us, the Northern Song period in which Huang Tingjian lived was one rife with bitter fighting among the various political factions.[41] Men could find themselves abruptly stripped of power and sometimes exiled to distant parts of the empire. It therefore seems likely that Huang intends this poem to comment on this situation and perhaps offer comfort to his friends who may have lost their positions or have been exiled. Likening them to such a virtuous recluse as Yan Guang would perhaps make their position seem more acceptable and their lives more worthwhile.

Wang Ruoxu's criticism centres on the idea that Huang Tingjian strays too far from the event to which he is alluding.[42] Wang quotes Ren Yuan 任淵 who says that "in the Eastern Han there were many famous and disciplined scholar-officials on whom [the dynasty] relied to last for such a long time. [But if we] trace [the dynasty's success] to the roots, the policies all came from Ziling's fishing rod." Wang quotes Ren Yuan to illustrate that the important point in the allusion to Yan is the fact that this man who lived as a recluse and fished all day rather than serve in government was the model of integrity to whom the officials of the Han looked for inspiration and who inspired them to perform their jobs wisely, thus enabling the Han dynasty to last for such a long time.

Wang feels that the allusion should be complete with the reference to Yan Guang's fishing rod and considers the final phrase of the poem, "a single thread in the wind" (*yisi*

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[40] Huang Baohua quotes this section from the *Yimin zhuan* 逸民傳 chapter of the *Hou Hanshu*. See Huang Baohua, *Huang Tingjian xuanji*, p. 254.
[41] Chen Yongzheng, ed., *Huang Tingjian shixuan*, p. 150.
[42] *HNSH*, p. 13.

*feng* —絲風), to be superfluous. Wang appears to view this phrase as simply adding more, but unnecessary, detail about the fishing rod and fails to take into account a couple of other points. Firstly, the word "*feng*" has the basic meaning of "wind," but can also mean "custom" or "fame" thus giving the phrase a second level of meaning which might read "one single trace of noble customs." In this way Huang might be attempting to build on the idea that Yan Guang is the embodiment of integrity. Further, Wang seems to have forgotten that Huang is writing about a painting and that perhaps this artistic phrase is intended to remind the reader of this fact. Finally, it is a poem and not a piece of historical commentary which Huang is writing, and this final, lonely image of the fishing line in the wind is an attractive one!

## Perfect Language for Perfect Meaning

As several scholars have noted, Wang's critical writing on poetry exhibits the same strong regard for matters of linguistic accuracy as do his comments on the classics and other prose writings. When compared to such other *shihua* texts as Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi shihua* 六一詩話 (*Master Six One's Talks on Poetry*), a significant number of extracts in Wang Ruoxu's *shihua* are concerned solely or almost exclusively with matters of linguistic detail, particularly with regard to the incorrect usage of particles or inappropriate employment of certain words or phrases. This heavy concentration on linguistic detail is something which Guo Shaoyu attributes to the fact that Wang's earlier scholarly endeavours were in the area of grammar and rhetoric.[43]

However, this is also illustrative of the properties such as *zide*, *hunquan* and *qing* which Wang conceives of as central to the practice of poetry. As was discussed in chapter two, language is the tool available to give expression to the poet's ideas and feelings, and although definitely subservient to content, language must be effectively employed if a faithful rendition of that intention is to be made. It is surely for this reason that Wang

[43] Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi*, p. 292.

pays such attention to linguistic details. The following examples illustrate Wang's concern with vocabulary selection:

> Old Du's [Du Fu] poem "Journey North" says, "Seeing his father he turns his face away and weeps." My uncle, Master Zhou, pointed out that "*ye* 耶" had been mistakenly used and should have been "*ji* 即." What he said was true. There were some men of old who used the words "*ye*" and "*niang*" 娘(mum) in their poems, but in the context of this [type of] poem it shouldn't be used.[44]

This entry emphasizes the need to employ appropriate vocabulary. Wang is here taking issue with Du Fu's use of the word "*ye*" for father. This is a rather colloquial word, much like the words "pop" or "my old man" in English, and Wang feels that it is inappropriate to use such a colloquialism in the ancient-style verse form (*gushi* 古詩) just as it would be inappropriate to use the term "*niang*" or "mum." Such informal language would be more appropriate in the *yuefu* 樂府 (Music Bureau) form. He concurs with his uncle's suggestion that "*ji* (immediately)" would be the better word choice, giving this line the meaning of "Seeing me, he immediately turns his face away and weeps." It is hard to tell if Wang is suggesting that Du Fu has written less than perfect poetry, or whether he is implying that the text of this poem has become corrupted and should be returned to the perfect way in which Du Fu must surely have written it. Taking into consideration the degree to which Zhou Ang and, as his student, Wang Ruoxu venerated Du Fu, the latter seems more likely.[45] Either way, Wang is disputing the idea that imperfect writing can come from a perfect mind and emphasizing the importance of appropriate diction.

However, Wang's concern is not merely with the technically correct use of language, but also with the selection of language appropriate to maintain balance in a composition:

> Tuizhi [Han Yu's] "Visiting Mount Heng" poem says, "In his hands he carried divining crescents and taught me how to throw them, / He said

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[44] *HNSH*, p.4.

[45] As in, for example, the passage from *HNSH*, p. 18 discussed on page 44. See *ZZJ*, 4.167 for Zhou Ang's veneration of Du Fu.

> that 'this is the most auspicious pattern and the others cannot compare.'" However, he need only have given the impression of spiritual response and that would have been be fine.[46]

Wang is objecting here to the poet directly quoting the old man at the temple rather than giving a more indirect impression of an auspicious response to the use of the divining crescents. In this poem by Han Yu, whose full title is *I visited the temple on Mount Heng and then spent the night at the mountain temple and wrote this on the gate tower* 謁衡嶽廟遂宿嶽寺題門樓, Han is writing on multiple levels and thus has to be careful to maintain the balance between those two levels. On the one hand, he is describing the godly world of the sacred peaks, specifically Mount Heng, and on the other he is narrating a tale of his own journey on that same mountain. As Michael Fuller explains of this poem, "Han Yu builds a framework of canonical reference and narrative in which to imbed his description of Mount Heng."[47] Hence Wang presumably feels that in using direct quotation, the narrative level (the level into which the words of the old man fit) is overwhelming the descriptive one. If Huang were to paraphrase the old man's words rather than quote them, the equilibrium between narrative and description would be better maintained.

A third example in which Wang illustrates how inappropriate choice of words can damage a poem is to be found in the first chapter of the *Hunan shihua*. This extract discusses a couplet by the late Tang poet Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (834 – 883)[48] in which Pi attempts to balance the use of "thirty" (*sanshi* 三十) in one line of a couplet with "(one) ten thousand" (*yiwan* 一萬) in the second line. On the surface this seems a reasonable effort on the part of the poet to observe the formal rules of parallelism required in the regulated verse form (*lushi* 律詩) by using complementary grammatical units in both

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[46] *HNSH*, p. 4.

[47] Michael Fuller, *The Road to East Slope: The Development of Su Shi's Poetic Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 111 – 12. For a more detailed discussion and translation of this poem, see Stephen Owen's *The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yü* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 97 – 101.

[48] Pi Rixiu's (c. 834 – c. 883) style name was Ximei 襲美 and he was a native of Xiangzhou 襄州 in modern-day Hebei province. His official career was unsuccessful and he got involved in rebellious activities which probably cost him his life. He is famous as a hermit-poet who wrote poetry of social criticism while living in seclusion.

lines of his couplet. That is to say, where he has used two numerical adjectives in the first line (the characters for "three" and "ten" must necessarily be put together to make "thirty") he tries to use the same construction in the second by adding the character "one" to "ten thousand," even though "ten thousand" can stand alone and does not require the modifier "one." Wang's concern is with the fact that this impinges on the conventional usage of the phrase "ten thousand years old," a phrase which actually has the connotation of eternity. The addition of the number one to a phrase indicating timelessness does not make sense and indeed only places limits on a phrase which should be without limit:

> Pi Rixiu's "詠房杜" (*Singing of a Concubine Rejected*) poem[49] says, "A yellow tower for thirty years / A pure breeze for one eternity." "*Qian gu* 千古" and "*wan gu* 萬古" are commonly used phrases and both have the meaning of timelessness. This particular use of the word "one —" only [serves to] limit it.[50]

From these passages we can see Wang's concern that words be carefully used in order that they allow the poet's meaning and ideas to be as clearly and faithfully portrayed as possible without distorting the language.

## The Responsibility of the Reader

Thus far we have considered Wang's views on the responsibility of the writer, and of the poet in particular. However, it was not only the necessity for correctness on the part of the writer which was of concern to Wang Ruoxu. As the first passage in his *shihua* demonstrates, he was also concerned with the ability of the reader to read "correctly" and to discern faults.[51] If, as Wang clearly believed, writing was a clear mirror reflecting the morality of the writer then the reader had to have an equal ability to discern this moral fibre through his reading.[52]

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[49] I have been unable to identify the poem from which this couplet is taken.
[50] *HNSH*, p. 6.
[51] *HNSH*, p. 1.
[52] This was a traditional Confucian belief. See for example the following statement in the *Mencius*: "What do you mean by 'understanding language' 知言 ?" "When someone's words are one-sided, I understand how his mind is clouded. When someone's words are loose and extravagant, I understand the pitfalls into

This particular passage, by far the longest in the *Hunan shihua* and too long to quote in full here (see Appendix A for a complete translation), is concerned with the ability to identify forgeries. Wang tells of his uncle, Zhou Ang's, comments on a number of Du Fu poems included in editions of Du's collected works but long held under suspicion as forgeries.[53] As Zhou points out, he is discussing the poems of Du Fu, but he does not intend his point to be applicable to poetry alone: "The reason I get so worked up and discuss this to such an extent is not simply because of these poems." To Zhou Ang and his protégé Wang Ruoxu, correct (*zhen* 眞) poetry is a direct indicator of a correct (that is to say, moral) mind. To them, if people lacked the critical acumen even to identify forgeries then they certainly would not have the perspicacity to recognize morally superior minds. Wang then goes on to assert that there is a great paucity of such discerning men in his own time, saying that "looking at my generation I just haven't seen this [understanding] and so I have explained and laid this out in order to await a clear-sighted gentleman."[54]

At this point it is of interest to consider Wang Ruoxu's choice in placing this passage at the start of his *shihua*. As a considerably longer, more detailed passage with a more sustained argument than is generally expected of *shihua* entries of this period, it must have struck the reader as unusual. It seems safe to assume, however, that Wang's aim was to acquaint the reader with his own responsibility in reading the *shihua*. That is, he wishes to make clear to the reader that, in appreciating this text, he has to read with the proper attitude and ability to discern Wang's own (presumably profound) morality when he approaches this text!

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which that person has fallen. When someone's words are warped, I understand wherein the person has strayed. When someone's words are evasive, I understand how the person has been pushed to his limit." *Mencius* II.a Translated by D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 78. See also the following comment by Confucius: "Confucius said, 'There is a record which says that the language (*yan* 言) has to be adequate to what is on the person's mind (*zhi* 志), and the patterning (*wen* 文) has to be adequate to the language. If a person does not use language, who will know what is on his mind? If the language lacks patterning, it will not go far.' 仲尼曰。志有之。言以足志。文以足言。不言。誰知其志。言之無文。行而不遠。 *Zuozhuan*, 25th year of Duke Xiang.

[53] This was a group of some forty or so poems inserted as "new additions" (*xin tian* 新添) in the *Qianjia zhu Du shi* 千家註杜詩 (*The Poetry of Du Fu, Annotated by a Thousand Scholars*).

[54] *HNSH*, p. 1.

It is also interesting to note the attitude toward Du Fu expressed by Zhou Ang, and through him Wang Ruoxu's similar attitude. As Wang indicates, Zhou based his appreciation and teaching of poetry on the work of Du Fu, considering him the apogee of all poets. Indeed, much of the debate in literati circles of the time boiled down to whether the Su Shi or Huang Tingjian schools were the true heir to the Du Fu mantle.[55] Du had been established as the primary poet par excellence in the Northern Song period (largely thanks to the efforts of Wang Anshi, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian) and this was readily accepted by the Jin intellectuals.

As Stephen West notes, while they unquestioningly accepted the status of Du Fu, what was problematic for Zhou and Wang was the existence of such Du Fu poems as the "new additions" mentioned above, some of which may be forgeries but others of which are likely genuine, as well as other poems which were stylistically less than perfect. Since perfect literature could come only from a morally perfect mind, so conversely a morally perfect mind could not produce less than perfectly correct literature. To Zhou, Wang and those of their ilk, imperfections in writing were the result of defects of character and not simply stylistic peccadilloes. Du Fu being universally recognized as being of the highest moral fibre, it was thus inconceivable that he could produce lack-lustre works. However, there were clearly some pieces which simply did not live up to expectation in Du's collection and the way they could be explained away was to remove them completely from Du's realm by ascribing them to forgers.[56]

Wang Ruoxu clearly agrees with his uncle's prescription that good writing comes from a good mind, and indeed he does not exhibit any understanding or acceptance of stylistic faults in his critical comments as, for example, Su Shi was able to do. However, neither does Wang unabashedly praise the work of Du Fu as the foundation-stone of all poetry as does his uncle. Comments on Du's poems are unexpectedly few and far between.

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[55] For further information on this debate see Wixted, "Some Chin Dynasty Issues in Literary Criticism."; West, "Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature."; West, "Wang Jo-hsü" in Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, pp. 867 - 868.

[56] West, "Serendipity: A Little Note on Du Fu Texts in the Jin," pp. 59 – 60.

Indeed, while the Su - Huang debate was concerned with which of these men had rightfully continued Du's line, Wang expresses little interest in this aspect of the discussion but rather seems to focus on the philosophy of literature (*wen*) and the Confucian principles it should uphold. Wang's concern appears to be centred on the issue of the function of literature in Confucian literati society, a point which will be discussed at greater length in the final chapter.

From the examples examined in the course of this chapter, it should be apparent that Wang Ruoxu was opposed to excessive embellishment, particularly in the use of allusion. He was also greatly concerned that reason (*li*) prevail in poetry and dismissed the efforts of poets who utilized such Chan-inspired techniques as the "live method" since he felt they did not accord with this. In addition, Wang demonstrated a considerable interest in linguistic accuracy in such matters as particles, word choice and the appropriate use of allusion and similar devices. He felt that if the poet could not select the correct vocabulary or make effective use of such techniques as allusion then his ability to convey his meaning and moral character would be seriously hampered. While a certain part of Wang's concern for correct language and appropriate use of allusion can be attributed to his desire to see linguistically attractive poetry, it is clear that he displays a greater degree of interest in the use of language as a vehicle to express the writer's morality, and in the place of language, and more broadly literature, in educated society.

# Chapter Four

## Sage or Charlatan?: The Critic as Bard

This chapter examines Wang Ruoxu's own poetry writing, paying particular attention to the critical values he outlines in his *shihua*. It demonstrates that, although his poetry does not put him on a par with the grand masters, Wang does clearly attempt to embody the values he so vocally prescribes.

### Wang Ruoxu as Poet

An unfortunate result of the turmoil which surrounded the Mongol conquest of the Jin state was the loss within a very short time of many Jin dynasty texts. The first of Wang Ruoxu's literary collections, the *Yongfu ji*, was one such text. As his extant collection, the *Hunan yilao ji*, contains primarily critical commentary along with a few prose pieces, we have to assume that the majority of his poetry and prose writings would have been in the *Yongfu ji*. Today only a handful of Wang's own poetry remains. Yuan Haowen's *Zhongzhou ji* contains some thirty-two poems by Wang and the *Quan jinshi* raises that number to forty-two.[1]

This chapter seeks to examine Wang's critical statements in light of his own poetic output. Given the vehemence of Wang's statements in his *shihua*, it is interesting to note the extent to which Wang's poems in fact reflect (and thus strengthen) his critical statements, or whether his own poetry exhibits those qualities he so disapproved of in other poets. Such a study must, of course, be tempered with a note of caution in that such a small sample of Wang's poetry cannot be sufficient to draw definitive conclusions

[1] See *Quan jinshi*, 86.144 – 151 and *ZZJ*, 6.286 – 292.

about his poetic style. We can reasonably make the assumption that the poems which are extant today were probably some of Wang's more successful ones for the simple reason that these were the poems others chose to record in their own works and which Yuan Haowen chose for inclusion in his anthology. However, this would of course reflect other people's tastes and judgements. Wang himself may in fact have felt that other works better illustrated his style and values.[2] Nonetheless, a number of interesting observations can be made about the poems available to us.

This group of poems encompasses a range of forms, themes and styles. These include ballads, discursive pieces and poems on poetry in *yuefu* (folk ballad), ancient style verse (*gushi*), regulated verse (*lushi* 律詩) and quatrain (*jueju* 絕句) forms.

## Poems on Poetry: The Problem of "*duotai huangu*"

When considering Wang Ruoxu's poems from the perspective of his critical views, one is immediately drawn to a set of four quatrains condemning Huang Tingjian and his poetic followers, the Jiangxi poets. Wang gives an explanation of his reasons for writing these poems in the relatively long title, *When it comes to poetry, [Huang] Shangu is constantly compared to [Su] Dongpo; thus students and followers place Dongpo at the top when it comes to prose, but follow Shangu's words when it comes to discussing poetry. Today's scholars mostly take this to be correct and so I have written four poems to discuss this* 山谷於詩，每與東坡相抗，門人親黨，遂有言文首東坡，論詩右山谷之語。今之學者亦多以爲然，漫賦四詩爲商略之云." Given the strength of Wang's dislike for Huang's style of poetry as illustrated in his *shihua* comments and the damage he clearly considers Huang to have done to the poetic tradition, it is hardly surprising to see such a forceful statement against him as in this title.

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[2] It should be kept in mind that Yuan Haowen, to the greatest extent possible, chose works he felt to be most in keeping with what he considered "Northern" style, that is works with a sense of strength, classical elegance and grandeur. As the name of the anthology implies, Yuan's concern was to preserve the culture of the Zhongzhou 中州 region (around the Yellow River), the cradle of Chinese civilization. Thus, Yuan was not unbiased in his selection of materials. See Hok-lam Chan, *The Historiography of the Chin Dynasty: Three Studies* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970), pp. 80 – 81.

These four quatrains reiterate some of the many reasons given in Wang's *shihua* as to why he dislikes Huang's and his successors' work. The first quatrain focuses on the demise of the Jiangxi school of poetry:

> Traces of greatness can never be followed,
> And sweat runs from the remaining children, expended in hasty travel.
> Who'd have guessed that it would only be after the move south,
> That the Jiangxi school would fall on hard times?[3]

Upon initial examination, this first poem in the series seems to suggest that no matter how much effort they expend, Huang's "children" (i.e. his followers) cannot hope to match Huang's talents, just as Huang himself exhibited only traces of the greatness of the poets who went before him. These followers and the Jiangxi style of poetry they practised survived through the remainder of the Northern Song dynasty and into the Southern Song and Jin periods. It was a very influential school for some considerable period of time with even such poets as Yang Wanli, famed for his simple, Chan Buddhism-inspired style, admitting to writing in the Jiangxi style in his early years. It was only in the Jin - Southern Song period that this form came under attack for its derivative nature and excessive use of obscure allusion and unusual diction. Wang expresses his amazement that such a style could survive for so long.

However, this quatrain exhibits a second level of meaning which deals more generally with the idea that greatness cannot be handed down from generation to generation by following any sort of set 'formula' and that later versions cannot have the same power as the original. In this way Wang Ruoxu is denouncing Huang Tingjian's notion that ideas are finite and so poets must borrow from the masters of the past (see chapter two). It also expresses surprise that a style based on such a weakening in the transmission from one generation to the next has lasted as long as it has.

While the use of the term *nanqian* 南遷 (move south), a commonly-used euphemism for the flight southward from Kaifeng to Hangzhou of the Song court which effectively

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[3] *Quan jinshi*, 86.146 - 147.

marked the end of the Northern Song period and the start of the Southern Song, makes it clear that in the second couplet Wang is referring to Huang's followers, it does also seem possible that he is alluding to the Jin dynasty. "*Nandu* 南渡" (southern crossing) is the term usually used in Jin sources for the removal of the capital from Yan to Bianjing late in the dynasty, but it is quite possible that Wang is intending a double edge to his use of *nanqian* and is implying the continuation of the Jiangxi style not only through the transition from Northern to Southern Song but also right up to the time when the Jin capital made its flight south.

This set of quatrains goes on to express Wang's distaste for the Jiangxi style of poetry which is attractive on the surface, but which is in fact causing a "sickness" in the Chinese poetic tradition (see line two of the third poem, "purple crabs really taste good, but you have to fear getting a fever [from them]")[4]. The third poem concludes with a couplet which lays the blame for this malady upon Huang's famous technique of "stealing the foetus and changing the bones," Wang's opposition to which has been discussed at length in chapters two and three:

> How many aspects are there to "stealing the foetus and changing the bones,"
> All in the smile of that gentleman?[5]

This is probably a statement of disapproval concerning following the technical styles rather than solely the spirit of great masters as well as suggesting more specifically Wang Ruoxu's belief in the superiority of Su Shi's skill over Huang's. Wang considers that Su Shi ("that gentleman") encompasses in even his most inconsequential, joking verses (see line one, "Even these joking verses everyone knows to have come from that supreme gentleman") everything that Huang sets out to do through his use of grand techniques such as "*duotai huangu*." Wang asserts that such is Su's talent that he is able to produce outstanding marvels even when only joking around whereas the work that Huang produces is not so multi-faceted and indeed is too rich, causing a bad feeling in those who

[4] *Quan jinshi*, 86.146 – 147. This purple crab is the *Partunus trituberculatus* which is the largest species of crab in the seas around China, Korea and Japan.
[5] *Quan jinshi*, 86.146 – 147.

"digest" it. As we have already observed, Wang felt that Huang's famed technique of studiously borrowing and adapting from earlier poets was merely imitation at its worst and amounted to plagiarism. This poem serves to emphasize that point, as does the fourth poem:

> Compositions which come from within the self are what is truly valuable,
> But robes and alms bowls handed down [from a master] – how can they be true?
> I already feel that the founder [of this school] is of a lower rung,
> So what kind of people are his profusion of heirs?[6]

Another point worth noting with regard to this last quatrain is Wang's use of Buddhist terms such as "the handing down of robes and alms bowls" 衣鉢相傳, "founding master" 祖師 and "[Dharma] heirs 法嗣" whilst deriding Huang Tingjian. Wang's irreverent attitude towards Buddhism and his refusal to acknowledge or appreciate Buddhist-inspired techniques has already been noted. His use of Buddhist terminology when describing the lamentable transmission of such corrupting ideas as Huang's can only serve to underscore his distaste for Buddhism.[7]

In this set of quatrains it is emphasised in no uncertain terms that Wang considers Huang's "*duotai huangu*" technique to be nothing but imitation and a poor idea from which to have a whole school develop. As imitation cannot of course reach either the state of natural attainment from within the self (*zide*) or the sincerity (*zhen*) which Wang so prized, imitating a style itself based on imitation could only lead to a generation of even lower quality poets.

## Further Poems on Poetry: Shallowness vs. Timelessness

The preceding set of poems on poetry is one of two sets which Hu Chuanzhi considers to be "particularly spectacular."[8] The second set is an equally critical attack on Wang

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[6] *Ibid.*
[7] For further discussion of Wang Ruoxu's attitude toward Buddhism, see chapter 5.
[8] Hu, *Jindai wenxue yanjiu*, p. 236.

Tingyun, an older Jin dynasty literatus famed as an all-rounder who excelled in the three arts of painting, calligraphy and poetry.[9] As the title to this set explains, *Wang Ziduan [Tingyun] said, "Recently I have suddenly come to feel that I have no refined thoughts, even if I do match Letian [Bai Juyi] in poetry." He belittled Letian so greatly that I matched his four quatrains* 王子端云：「近來陡覺無佳思，縱有詩成似樂天。」其小樂天甚矣，予亦嘗和爲四絕。

Wang Ruoxu was very appreciative of Bai Juyi's poetry, and indeed placed him almost on a par with Du Fu. Wang was drawn to Bai Juyi's use of simple, unadorned language which gave an air of clarity to his poems. Bai's choice of subject matter which came from the heart and was a direct expression of his feelings (*qing*) was also something which impressed Wang. The second poem in this set makes clear Wang's feeling that the current obsession with the ornate, complex Jiangxi style has led to a deterioration in poetry and means that the next generation will not have excellent examples from today's poets to emulate:

> To the east smearing on powder and to the west daubing on rouge,
> contending for fresh beauty,[10]
> These days everyone combs and preens, really quite pitiful.
> The people and things of this age are weak like a mouse's tail,
> And those born after will never be able to discourse with former worthies.[11]

In the next poem, Wang goes on to praise Bai Juyi's work for its timeless perfection and states his desire to continue to follow the spirit of Bai's poetry despite the fact that current tastes mean that this causes him to be ridiculed. His likening of Bai's poetry to large numbers of flawless pearls illustrates the high regard in which he holds Bai's work. Wang's choice of such a simple, plain item of beauty as the pearl seems significant in

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[9] *JS* 126.2731; *ZZJ* 3.145; for an evaluation of Wang Tingyun's painting and calligraphy, see Susan Bush, "Literati Culture Under the Chin (1122 – 1234)," *Oriental Art* 15 (1969), pp. 103 – 112.

[10] "To the east smearing and to the west daubing" (*dongtu ximo* 東塗西抹) refers to a woman applying rouge and make-up to her face. It can also mean recklessly applying pen to paper (writing). Wang is here likening physical vanity and the quest to be more beautiful than others to the "vanity" of the Jiangxi poets who seek to make their poetry more outstanding than that of others.

[11] *Quan jinshi*, 86.147.

itself. While the simple lustre of the pearl may be representative of the style of Bai Juyi's poetry, the fact that pearls lose their lustre and body unless worn next to the skin may suggest a connection to the idea of feelings (*qing*) which obviously are contained inside a person and the idea of *zide* or "coming from within." Pearls attain their beauty from close proximity to the body, the vessel for emotion:

> A thousand pecks of lustrous pearls, each one round,
> Completely without defect the whole way through.
> Following him [Bai] I repeatedly suffer the jeers of a crowd of imbeciles,
> But I don't damage the "triple brights"[12] with endless worries.[13]

This quatrain beautifully illustrates Wang's feeling that the poetry of Bai Juyi has eternal appeal whereas the Jiangxi style will ultimately prove to be a passing fad. Another interesting aspect of this and the previous set of poems is that Wang appears to himself be adopting the Jiangxi style. He employs a number of dense allusions as well as unusual language to produce poems which, while interesting in their ingenuity, are difficult to understand, thus making them strikingly reminiscent of the Jiangxi form.

One hopes that Wang is aiming, by employing a style that he has so openly denounced, to demonstrate the fact that anyone can imitate and produce a competent likeness (that is, write in the Jiangxi style), but that the results lack freshness and vigour. It is also probable that in his younger years Wang Ruoxu himself wrote in the Jiangxi style as did so many other poets who later came to denounce it, but the fact that these poems voice his opposition to this form negates the suggestion that these are any such youthful experiments. Most likely Wang wrote in this form as a sort of intellectual exercise, for certainly it is technically and intellectually challenging. It also seems safe to assume that in choosing to write his criticisms of Jiangxi writers in Jiangxi form, Wang is indulging in parody.

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[12] The "triple brights" (*san guang* 三光) are the sun, the moon and the stars.
[13] *Quan jinshi*, 86.147.

While the above two sets of poems seek specifically to discuss (and perhaps also demonstrate) good and bad poetry, the remaining poems available to us seem to be Wang's attempts to put into practice the qualities he considers necessary for good poetry. Although these poems are by no means all successful, we can certainly see echoes of the great poets admired by Wang in some of them.

## Trying to Live Up to Bai Juyi's Legacy

Despite his approval of Bai Juyi's very plain, unadorned style and poignant subject matter, Wang's poems of social criticism do not manage to attain the stark simplicity of Bai Juyi's works. In his *Lament of an Impoverished Scholar* 貧士嘆, Wang expresses the hardships faced by the literati. While it was true at any time that a lower level government post did not lead to riches and that those graduates who could not find government sinecures were often destined to a life of poverty, this was particularly true of the Jin period. As will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, it was not until toward the end of the dynasty that the Jurchen started to make full use of the Han Chinese literati. Fearing the Chinese would gain too much power, questioning their loyalty to the Jurchen and having to appease the Jurchen nobles who felt that positions of power should go to themselves and their offspring, the earlier rulers tended to place Chinese only in the lowest positions. This led to considerable discontent among the Chinese literati who saw their talents wasted and their Confucian duty to aid in the ruling of the state left unfulfilled. Physical and financial hardship of course was also the result of low positions on top of the turmoil which had seen the loss of family fortunes. Wang wrote of these hardships afflicting the impoverished literatus as follows:

> His cooking pot is dusty
> And his pitcher is wanting in grain
> As the north wind shrieks and shrills, blowing apart the house.
> Entering the door and looking around it's so miserable and chill,
> That his children hang their heads and his old wife cries.
> This age has no upright gentlemen like Lu Zijing or Cai Mingyuan,[14]

[14] Lu Zijing was the style name of Lu Xiao 魯肅 (172 – 217). Lu was a famous general of the kingdom of Wu 吳 in the Three Kingdoms period who joined forces with Liu Bei 劉備 to fight against Cao Cao 曹操.

Therefore they are all likely to starve to death, their bodies filling up a watery gully.
What purpose can there be in the sky giving birth to us,
When dazzling the age with deeds and fame really isn't enough?
He'll try taking a short sword and paying a visit to the vermilion gates,
With their great bellies full of meat and grain.[15]

This poem certainly follows the style of Bai Juyi's New Music Bureau poems (*xin yuefu* 新樂府) in that it voices a theme of social criticism and the language used is not overly complex.[16] Wang perhaps does not achieve the stark simplicity of Bai, but nor is his language as scholarly or difficult to understand as that of poets such as Huang Tingjian. He does not make excessive use of allusion, simply mentioning two famed Confucian scholars in line six, and possibly using a second allusion in the penultimate line (the short sword), although I have been unable to establish this. These features are certainly in keeping with Wang's statements in his *shihua* text advocating the avoidance of embellishment and the overuse of allusion in order to aid ease of understanding.

## Sincere Emotion or Trite Philosophizing?: Considering *zhen*

Another point which should be considered with regard to this poem is Wang's oft-stated concern with poets writing as an expression of their own feelings and thus their writing coming from within themselves (*zide*), rather than being borrowed and reworked from earlier poets. The above poem does strike the reader as being the result of a real experience and the expression of the emotions it causes. The poet's sense of helpless frustration is certainly obvious. This poem admittedly does seem rather bleaker and more violent than Bai's work, perhaps bearing a greater similarity to Li He's 李賀 (790 – 816)

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eventually defeating Cao's army in the battle of the Red Cliff. He was widely mourned by people in the kingdoms of Wu and Shu 屬 after he died. I have been unable to identify Cai Mingyuan 蔡明遠. The *Zhongzhou ji* version of this poem differs slightly from that in the *Quan jinshi* and gives the name Guo Yuanzhen 郭元振 in place of Cai Mingyuan. Guo Yuanzhen was the style name of Guo Zhen 郭震 (656 – 713), another famous general this time of the Tang dynasty. See *ZZJ*, 6.287.

[15] *Quan jinshi*, 86.144 – 145.

[16] For further information on the *xin yuefu* form developed by Bai Juyi, see Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp.184 – 188; Dore J. Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 54 – 79.

poems such as *Song of an Old Jade Miner* 老夫採玉歌, but it seems no less genuine for that.

In a five character ancient style verse entitled *Losing a Son* 失子 Wang gives a poignant insight into an unhappy occasion in his life and the way in which he struggles to come to terms with it:

> Such great beauty, this child in the palm of my hand,
> Who abandoned me so hastily.
> Who caused him to come,
> And then leave again so soon?
> In this lifetime I've had three children,
> Soon gone like the morning dew.
> Looking at myself, how can I not be sad,
> When it seems that our allotted time is fixed by Heaven?
> Since I've studied the Way,
> A multitude of suffering is quite simple to overcome.
> If there is to be a future then that certainly is something to be hopeful about,
> But if there really isn't then that's also something to be feared.
> When I've found peace in life,
> Politics has added burdens.
> My marriage has caused me troubles in the here and now,
> And I have many worries about after I die.
> How long is a lifetime
> Spent making childish mistakes?
> I look around and tell my bawling wife,
> As she should take this as a teaching.[17]

This poem seems less successful than the previous example. Once again, it is certainly based on personal experience and reaction to that experience. Wang surely must have had to struggle to find a way to cope with and accept the loss of another child, and undoubtedly he would have turned to philosophical introspection. Lines one to eight lay bare the poet's pain at his loss and again seem to be a good example of truthfully expressing innermost emotions (*zhen*), which Wang considered so fundamental to good poetry. The remainder of the poem, however, does not live up to the opening section.

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[17] *Quan jinshi*, 86.149.

Sincerity gives way to what can only be described as trite sermonizing which negates the personal aspect of the theme. The abrupt transition from the mournful lyricism of the first eight lines to the harsh mock philosophizing of the second half also lessens the effectiveness of this poem.

## Pushing the Boundaries of *zhen*

Although *Losing a Son* may not be the most successful of compositions, it does at least accord with Wang's stated poetic values. By contrast, the existence of such poems as *Moved by Autumn* 感秋 has to bring into doubt Wang's own sincerity and ability to adhere to his principle of writing only spontaneously and as a direct expression of his emotions. This poem appears to be firmly in the tradition of "autumn meditations" popular in the Tang dynasty. In keeping with this theme, Wang uses natural autumnal imagery as a hermetic expression of his own condition – just as autumn is a time of decay, so his body is aging. He first establishes correspondences between the autumn environment and his own situation and then moves to a more philosophical discussion of aging:

> The west wind shakes the branches in the courtyard,
> Sparse leaves echo with a soughing swish.
> Sky and earth come together in a bleak line,
> And my feelings are of being trapped.
> The green of spring so dim as to be long spent,
> While in the blinking of an eye, half a hundredyear gone.
> Since growing up
> I've continually felt that the sun and moon are forcing me onward.
> Deeds and fame are nothing of which to be proud,
> Old age nothing to be regretted.
> My heart is moved by the times
> And this is something I can't alleviate.
> In the clearness of morning I comb my short hair,
> Already seeing a few strands of white.
> Although I could use a razor and tweezers,
> That seems almost too childish.
> This life is just a matter of shedding the shell,
> As destroyed and cast off it's nothing to be sorry about.
> It's even more so with hair,

So why try to disguise it?
A land-like expanse of azure blue,
Star upon star coming out again in succession.
In the end when white covers my head,
How can I repeatedly clutch them and pick them out?[18]

The reader is reminded of such poems as Han Yu's *Autumn Meditations*, in particular Han's first poem in this set:

On the two fine trees before my window,
The crowds of leaves are bright and verdant.
Once the autumn wind puffs over them,
Rustling, they sing without end.
A faint light shines on an empty bed,
As they enter my ears, especially at midnight.
Sorrow and melancholy come for no reason,
Stirred to sighs I end up rising and sitting.
When the sky grows bright, I gaze on the faces of the leaves,
They don't resemble what they used to be.
Hsi-ho [Xihe] drives the sun and moon,[19]
So swiftly we can't depend on them.
Though there are many roads in this floating life,
There is only one track, racing towards death.
Why recklessly make oneself bitter? –
We should get wine and enjoy ourselves a while.[20]

Both poets set the autumn scene and then connect their physical surroundings to their feelings before moving on to a more detached, philosophical discussion of ageing. Both poets arrive at the conclusion that death is inevitable and so there is no sense in being preoccupied with trying to fight it. Wang attempts to employ the same light-hearted, humorous touch in his philosophising as does Han Yu in such poems as *Losing a Tooth* 落齒 with the language he uses somewhat more complex, but still more like that of Han Yu than other poets such as Meng Jiao.[21] Whether Wang is intentionally trying to

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[18] *Quan jinshi*, 86.148.
[19] Xihe was the charioteer of the sun.
[20] Translated by Owen, *The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yü*, p. 256. For further discussion on the "Autumn meditations" theme as employed by Han Yu and Meng Jiao, see pp. 161 – 184 & pp. 255 – 269.
[21] "Losing a Tooth" is translated in *Ibid.*, pp. 185 – 186.

emulate the techniques employed by Han is hard to assess because, beyond arguing about points of linguistic technicality, he does not dwell on the work of Han Yu in the *Hunan shihua*.[22]

Nonetheless, when considering this poem in light of Wang's critical comments in his *shihua*, the reader is immediately struck by the fact that Wang's own innate inspiration has not allowed him to write naturally and attain a "seamless whole" in his work (*hunquan*). Rather, this poem seems stilted and gives the impression of trying too hard, or at least of being self-consciously artistic.

However, the most significant doubt over the sincerity of Wang's emotions in the poem, and by extension the veracity of his critical statements about poetic writing, comes from the fact that parts of this work appear to be borrowed from another poem called *White Hair Lament* 白髮嘆. A brief perusal of *Moved by Autumn* makes it obvious that not only does Wang reuse virtually the same philosophical concept as in *White Hair Lament*, but he even reuses the same lines with little or no adjustment:

> *White Hair Lament*
> At dawn I comb my short hair,
> Already seeing a few strands of white.
> My wife and children are startled and together sigh,
> Telling me I ought to quickly pull them out.
> I laugh then and respond,
> That it's a trifling thing and so what's the point?
> In the end our vitality is limited by our bodies,
> Which when cast away and destroyed won't even be worth pity.
> It's even more so with the hairs on our heads,
> So why would we want to try hard to disguise them?
> In the end when they cover my head,
> How could I clutch them one after the other and pull them out?[23]

It is obvious when reading *Feelings on Autumn* that all the sections do not fit smoothly together. The first problem arises with the sudden, abrupt shift from philosophical

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[22] See for example *HNSH*, pp. 4 – 5.
[23] *Quan jinshi*, 86.145.

musings on the poet's feeling of being trapped, to talking of the white hair on his head. This observation of white hairs does not seem a likely continuation of the poet's line of thought (and as such is not in accordance with the principle of *li*). The mood of the poem also undergoes an abrupt alteration at the same point as melancholy musings give way to upbeat, humorous discussion. Later in the poem Wang again shifts briefly to the natural scene (lines 21 and 22) then straight back to the discussion about grey hairs. The reader cannot help but feel that these lines belong with the first section of the poem (up to line 12) and that he is in fact reading two separate poems which have been uncomfortably fused together.

There are three conclusions we can draw from this. Firstly, and sadly most likely, that Wang's inspiration has failed him and he has found himself reusing old lines. Second, that feeling he has produced some effective lines to illustrate a worthwhile idea but those lines are somewhat submerged in their original poem, Wang chose to extract these lines and expand upon them in a separate poem. Lastly, that this poem (*Feelings on Autumn*) has somehow become corrupted and two poems have been accidentally combined. There are problems with this last possibility, however, and it seems the least likely. *White Hair Lament* is recorded only in the *Quan jinshi*. The *Zhongzhou ji* was compiled within a decade of Wang's death in 1255, making errors unlikely. Yuan Haowen was inclined to polish the poems he included in his anthology and we know from Wu Zhuo's 吳焯 colophon to the *Hunan yilaoji* that he appears to have taken such liberties with Wang Ruoxu's poetry.[24] However, if this was the cause of this textual problem then it stands to reason that it would have appeared in the *Zhongzhou ji* also. What does present a problem with this last conclusion, that of two poems becoming accidentally joined together, is the existence of lines 21 and 22. If two poems had accidentally become fused together, it seems strange that these two lines would have ended up in such a position. An editor careless enough to run two poems together would surely still have been able to spot the incongruity of lines twenty-one and twenty-two.

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[24] See Hok-lam Chan, *The Historiography of the Jin Dynasty*, p. 82 & n. 47, p. 113. According to Chan, this colophon by Wu Zhuo contains a comparison of the textual variants of eight of Wang Ruoxu's poems. It is appended to the *Guoxue jiben congshu* edition of Wang's collected writings. I have not had the opportunity to consult this colophon.

## Returning Home: True Emotion Comes from Personal Experience

To Hu Chuanzhi, Wang's most successful poetry is the set called *Five Quatrains Describing My Feelings Upon Once Again Arriving at My Old Garden* 再至故園述懷五絕.[25] These poems were clearly written after the Jin dynasty had collapsed and Wang had disguised himself as a commoner to effect his escape back to his homeland in the north. Having been absent for a long time and the passage of time having been less than peaceful, there are many changes in the garden and also, we suspect, in Wang himself. The first quatrain tells of Wang's long-held desire when far away to return to his garden. However, having returned he does not find the peace he had hoped for as the turbulence of the times has brought change not only to the capital and the administrators there, but also to his out-of-the-way old home:

> Day after day at heaven's edge I hated not returning,
> But upon return, an old man's tears further dampen my clothes.
> How is my injured heart any different from the Liaodong crane?[26]
> Not only have the people gone, but the things are gone too.[27]

As Hu points out, the poet's situation and the physical changes around him play strongly on his emotions. This causes Wang to truly write from deep within himself and give voice to the "boundless deep feeling" we see in these poems and which Wang considered so important in the art of poetry.[28] This sincerity of emotion comes across equally in the other poems in this series. For example, in poem number three which focuses on the physical world and the way it has been turned upside down, and number four which explores the human realm by harking back to the past to show what has been lost:

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[25] Hu, *Jindai wenxue yanjiu*, p. 236.

[26] The Liaodong crane is an allusion to a poem in the *Soushenji* 搜神記 about a famous Daoist of the Han dynasty named Ding Lingwei who was transformed into an immortal crane. He flew back to his native home of Liaodong and found that everything except the city walls had changed. The relevant lines of the poem are as follows: "There's a bird, there's a bird: it's Ding Lingwei. / Departed from the house for aeons, today he returns. / The outer walls still exist, the people do not. / Why not study to be a transcendent – see the burial mounds piled up?" Translation by David Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 165.

[27] *Quan jinshi*, 86.146.

[28] Hu, *Jindai wenxue yanjiu*, p. 236.

Mountain apricots and brook peaches have changed into brambles and thorns,
And the Wutaige pavilion has fallen to dust.
Since spring came with all its happenings, how can I bear to walk around here,
While beyond the gates, drifting orioles in vain cry out to me?[29]

In my dreams I think back to festive occasions,
When there was good fortune and in those years this soul was happy.
Idly I stand in the rays of the setting sun and watch children at play,
Envying their carefree deeds, these peaceful folk.[30]

Poem three presumably refers to the suicide of Aizong, the last Jin emperor, and the downfall of the dynasty as indicated by the reference to the events of spring in line three. Line four subtly continues this reference with its mention of orioles aimlessly flying and calling out. Normally spring birds, the fact that they are still here is a further indicator that nothing is right with the world. The fourth poem further enhances the mood of sadness which pervades this poem series. Watching children playing with no cares or worries is a poignant reminder to Wang of past times when the world was at peace and he was happy.

The final quatrain closes this set on a dark, philosophical note, questioning the point of existence in such a world:

Difficulty and danger I have experienced to the full and my hair has turned to silken thread,
Once again I feel that success is unpredictable.
How many times have I plaintively called out, raising my head to ask Heaven,
What could be better than to return to the time before I was born?[31]

Having experienced much hardship the poet is now old and his hair has turned white (turned to silken thread). He speculates that in such unpredictable times, perhaps it would

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[29] *Quan jinshi*, 86.146.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*

be better to return to the start of his life in order to once again enjoy the innocence of childhood (see the fourth poem in this series). Alternatively he may be suggesting that it would be preferable to return to an earlier age than the one in which he has lived, an age when China enjoyed peace and a child-like innocence.

This sequence of poems is a good example of Wang's beliefs in action. Allusion is kept to a minimum and used only where it will blend in and add something to the poem while still leaving it easily understandable. For the most part, Wang's language also is relatively clear, with appropriate, mid-register vocabulary which wouldn't distract the reader with its complexity and which thus allows the sentiment to shine through. That said, there are some awkward constructions such as "since Spring came with all its happenings" (*chunlai dishi* 春來底事) in line three of the third poem. Such sections, while reducing the artistic quality of the poem, do not render it difficult to understand as did the intentional efforts of the Jiangxi poets to make language unusual, to which Wang strenuously objected. The subject matter is of direct relevance to the times, is based on the poet's own experiences and feelings and is very well expressed; thus satisfying Wang's much vaunted requirements of *zhen*, *zide* and *hunquan*.

These few examples give a reasonable cross-section of Wang Ruoxu's own extant poetry. As we have seen, Wang himself cannot live up to the qualities he demands in his *shihua*. While he does have some moments of intimate self-expression, particularly in the final series of five quatrains, for the most part Wang is unable to sustain any direct expression of emotions in his poems and tends to abruptly switch to a false-sounding philosophical mode, the transition to which ruins any chance of attaining his much sought-after "seamless perfection." Indeed, Wang's own poetry is rather mediocre when judged by his critical standards, giving credence to the adage that the best critics are not necessarily also the best writers. However, Wang's attempts to embody the criteria he believes to make a good poem are clearly visible (sometimes painfully so) in his own poetry and this must certainly attest to Wang's unwavering belief in the critical tenets he posits in his *shihua*.

# Chapter Five

## The Bigger Picture

This chapter asserts that aesthetic ideals alone cannot explain the consistently polemic statements made by Wang Ruoxu throughout his *shihua*. It demonstrates that Wang's *shihua* with its focus on Confucian values is considerably influenced by such social and cultural factors as the poetry debate among Jin literati, the court debate regarding the legitimacy of the Jin succession, and the influential nature of Buddhism and Daoism in Jin society. It suggests that, consciously or subconsciously, as a reaction to the climate of the times Wang uses his *shihua* as a vehicle to assert the value of Confucian learning and Wang's own position as a master in that tradition.

### The Literary Debate

In the preceding chapters considerable discussion has taken place regarding the remarkable degree of continuity and organization of argument in the *Hunan shihua* as well as the strength of Wang Ruoxu's dislike for Huang Tingjian's poetry and the *Jiangxi* style of his followers. When reading through the *Hunan shihua*, the reader is struck by the idea that Wang does not show the same passion for or against the poetic output of any other poet. He does not dwell on other poets at any great length and nowhere does he exhibit the same concern as for the poetry of Huang Tingjian. It seems doubtful that Wang's personal tastes in literature could be solely responsible for a text which, for the above reasons, is singled out by scholars as an unusual example of the *shihua* genre.

Further, in chapter three it was suggested that Wang's emphasis on the need for careful selection of language in order to accurately convey meaning and morality somewhat

contradicts the concept of a natural expression (*zide*) of true emotion (*zhen* and *qing*) so emphasized in other entries in the *Hunan shihua*. Surely naturalness of expression must be lost if the poet concentrates on selecting the perfect words to express that emotion? This seeming contradiction leads one to suspect that there was a greater motivation behind Wang's concern that poetry be a vehicle to express the poet's morality than can be attributed to literary aesthetics alone.

This final chapter will examine the political and social situation during Wang's lifetime in an effort to shed more light on his reasons for creating such an opinionated and polemic work. Living as he did in a cosmopolitan time yet one of great turbulence, it seems reasonable to conclude that a number of external factors exerted varying degrees of influence upon Wang Ruoxu and his critical theories.

One of the greatest direct influences upon Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism must have been the debate among the literati of the day over the age-old question of the relative merits of substance and form. Generally speaking, in the Jin period there seem to have been two schools of literary theorists positing two very different attitudes toward poetry and prose (or more generally, toward classical writing). The first group, to which Wang Ruoxu clearly belonged, was headed by the eminent literatus Zhao Bingwen, and Yuan Haowen can also be said to have belonged to this faction. These men believed in the use of plain, ornament-free language in order to allow a concentration on substance and scholarship. To borrow the terms of Stephen West, this group could be described as the "substantive" school.[1]

The "substantive" critics were greatly opposed to the ideas of their rivals, the "form" school, which included such men as Li Chunfu, Li Tianying 李天英 (fl. 1215) and Lei Yuan 雷淵 (1184 – 1231). These men favoured startling, unusual language and placed great emphasis on form to show originality of expression. Liu Qi described Li Chunfu's poetic style by saying that "he was inclined to be superficial in poetry and only discussed

[1] West, *Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature*, p. 18.

clever skills and the flavour of words."[2]

A picture of the ferocity of this debate can be seen in the following passage from Liu Qi which gives us not only Liu's own view but also a sampling of the criticisms of other literati such as Li Chunfu whose works are now lost to us and of whom only miscellaneous comments survive in the work of others:

> Li Pingshan [Li Chunfu] told his disciples to create a singular style when writing. He would tell them each time, "Turn to a new path, do not follow upon the heels of others." He was very fond of the unusual and strange. But his prose did not go beyond that of *Zhuangzi*, *Zuozhuan*, Liu Zongyuan or Su Dongpo; nor did his poetry go beyond that of Lu Tong or Li He. In later life he loved the work of Yang Wanli, commenting that it had a spirit and liveliness difficult for other men to attain. When Zhao Bingwen taught his juniors to write prose and poetry he would say, "In writing you can't hold to one style – sometimes be startling and archaic, sometimes be ordinary and light. Why be fettered?" Li Chunfu once talked to me about Zhao, "He has a lot of talent and the atmosphere evoked by his work is very robust, but he could not avoid places where he "omitted the branches and dropped the knots," that is, he studied Su Dongpo but could never become [like him]." Zhao also told me, "Chunfu's prose is all one style and his poetry has but one style of sentence." Yet Zhao's poetry often plagiarized the ancients and sometimes there were several lines [from other writers] in a single piece – this is also a literary defect. Pingshan once prefaced the *Xianxianji*[3] with these lines: "His poetry often has the words of Li Bai and Bo Juyi in it, which I can immediately recognize," and he continued, "A man should not gobble up someone else's spittle but should write true literature like Zhichun [Li Chunfu] and Li Tianying." This was also an implicit criticism.[4]

It is obvious from this rather long passage that caution should be exercized in trying to definitively group literati into one school or another as there was some considerable overlap, as for example with Zhao's seemingly advocating the use on occasion of the startling and archaic which are generally put under the rubric of the "form" school.[5]

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[2] *GQZ*, 8.67.
[3] *Xianxianji* was the abbreviated title of Zhao Bingwen's collected works, the *Xianxian laoren fushui wenji*.
[4] *GQZ*, 8.67.
[5] The predilection of such early modern scholars as Guo Shaoyu to identify two distinct schools and attribute literati unquestionably to either one school or the other has been questioned by contemporary scholars such as Stephen West (see *Studies in Chin Dynasty (1115 – 1234) Literature*, p. 19).

What this passage does emphasize, however, is the degree to which such issues were discussed under the Jin dynasty. That Liu Qi's memoir devotes so much space to this literary debate of the day is a clear indicator that this discussion was one of great importance to the literati of the Jin dynasty. In order to understand why, we must first briefly examine the role of literature in Confucian culture and by extension the role of the literati.

The basic philosophical concepts which were to develop in later periods originated in comments in the *Lunyu* dating from the fourth to second centuries B.C. The primary assertion was that literary writings reflected the values of the time in which they were produced and that to effectively present these values a certain degree of craft was necessary in language but that a fine balance had to be maintained between form and content. By the time Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837 – 908) published his *Shipin* 詩品 (*Twenty-four Categories of Poetry*) the idea that the function of poetry was to express states of mind (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志) was firmly rooted.[6] The Northern Song saw considerable development in thought concerning the function and practice of poetry and other forms of literature. The idea that literary activities were a means to cultivate *wen* 文 and thus a man could cultivate his moral self and contribute to the order of the state through his writings was by now a well-established facet of Chinese culture.[7] That the literati debate over poetic form was high in Wang Ruoxu's consciousness is obvious from the strong argument he makes against the values of the form school in the *Hunan shihua*. The forcefulness of Wang's *shihua* comments and the tone of unwavering certainty with which he makes them points to a desire on Wang's part to assert his moral cultivation and qualifications.

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[6] For a detailed discussion, see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, pp. 19 – 358 and Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*.

[7] At the time of the Jin dynasty, *wen* encompassed the fields of civil order, the textual tradition and personal accomplishment. It can here be translated as "civilization."

## The Position of the Literati under the Jurchens

The literati class began to emerge during the Tang dynasty taking over from the aristocracy as the cultural leaders of society, but didn't develop fully until the Northern Song period. At that time, leading figures such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007 – 1072) and Su Shi established the role of the literati as talented men who cultivated their moral selves and their relationship to the cosmic principles of the *Dao* 道 (Way) through the practice of literature and the arts. These men demonstrated this cultivation and developed their morality by sitting for the imperial examinations which led to the award of the *jinshi* 進士 or "Presented Scholar" degree. This in turn opened the door to attaining a position within the government and proceeding up the ranks of the civil service, for Northern Song dynasty China placed a heavy emphasis on civil as opposed to military government and it was the literati degree-holders who formed the backbone of this civil government. The educated Chinese of the Jin inherited this idea of the role and position of the literati from the Northern Song and sought ways to fulfil these responsibilities. Therefore they engaged in literary pursuits which brought them into direct contact with and thus affirmed their place in the Chinese literary and philosophical tradition.

As a well-known literatus in his own right and as one who was personally acquainted with all the principal players in the Jin dynasty cultural debate, Wang Ruoxu must surely have been keen to participate and offer his own input as any good Confucian should. He likely saw his *shihua* writings as not simply a piece of literary criticism with the aim of rectifying the current poetic situation, but also as a rather grander contribution in his attempt to showcase his position in the classical Confucian tradition, a tradition into which the Jurchen were keen to integrate themselves. Not only would this assuage Wang's need to affirm his position in his own native Chinese culture in a period when a foreign people were ruling over his homeland, but it would also give him the opportunity to remind the Jurchen of the value of the Chinese literati. It was only in the latter years of the Jin dynasty that the status of the Chinese literati was restored to some degree, so this would most probably still have been a point of concern for Wang and his fellow literati.

By Wang Ruoxu's time the cultural and social realm of the Jin dynasty was flourishing. While literati culture practically disappeared from northern China in the immediate aftermath of the Jurchen invasion and remained out of view for the next two generations thereafter, the 1190's saw what has been described as an "intellectual revival" precipitated by the Jurchen rulers. The *Jinshi* talks of a flourishing of learning during the reigns of Shizong and Zhangzong, that is, the period from 1161 – 1208.[8] The imperial examination system which had been of such importance in the administration of the Northern Song empire had been reinstated by the Jin rulers with an emphasis on the composition of poetry, albeit of a highly stylized nature. The Jurchen leaders seemed intent on developing a dynasty as culturally advanced as the earlier Chinese models upon which they were basing their own.[9] They recognised that the literati had formed the basis of the civil service under the Northern Song and consequently did what they could to engineer the reappearance of this class. Certainly the Jin dynasty saw a greater proportion of Chinese literati in public office than did the next foreign dynasty, the Mongol Yuan.

However, the Jurchen rulers were in the position of being a small minority of approximately six million in an empire of about forty five million.[10] For them it was crucial to find a balance between the wishes of the Jurchen aristocracy, upon whom they were dependent for military support, and their own desire to turn to Chinese methods to improve the way in which their empire was governed as a means to improve their own situation and to mollify their Chinese subjects. The Jurchen aristocracy wielded considerable military and political power as their hereditary rights gave them control over territory and population and the expectation of participation in political decision-making, all of which led to a situation of regional warlordism. For this reason the Jurchen

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[8] *JS*, 125.2713.

[9] Note, however, that it was not the intent of the Jurchen rulers to adopt Chinese practices at the expense of their own Jurchen heritage. An example of this is emperor Shizong's attempts to revive Jurchen culture and maintain the elevated status and prospects of the Jurchen people despite his patronage of the Chinese literati. He is quoted in the *Jinshi* as saying that "Hans and Jurchens are in fact two [separate groups]" (*see JS*, 88.1964-65).

[10] Ping-ti Ho, "An Estimate of the Total Population of Sung-Chin China," in *Études Song in Memoriam "Étienne Balázs*, pp. 41 – 43 and Franke, "The Chin Dynasty" in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, pp. 278 – 79.

emperors needed to centralize the empire and to do this they felt that the traditional Chinese prefectural system would be a good solution. The result was a need for expert administrators (i.e. the Chinese or men of other ethnicities who had experience of the Chinese model of government) who were loyal to the concept of the throne. Thus the Jurchen rulers needed to find a way to ensure not only the participation of well-educated, experienced Chinese but also to ensure that they were sufficiently satisfied with the regime as to remain loyal to it.

However, as Peter Bol points out, attaining one's *jinshi* degree did not guarantee a Chinese literatus a position in the government. Although physically a tiny minority in their own empire, the Jurchens continued to be a great force in its governance, with Han Chinese accounting for slightly less than fifty percent of the Jin government and the minority Jurchens for forty-two percent in the period 1175 – 1204. The period 1205 – 1234 saw these figures almost reverse with Jurchens accounting for forty-nine percent and Chinese for the lesser percentage of forty-five. A further shift occurred in that degree holders accounted for ninety percent of Han Chinese officials in the 1175 – 1204 period but for only sixty-four percent in the later period.[11]

That the Chinese literati were not satisfied with their position in the civil service is clear from a comment by Yuan Haowen who complains that the degree-holders were underused and that they were employed merely for reasons of demonstrating fairness and not because of their perceived abilities:

> Most of those who occupied these positions [of ministers] were imperial clansmen, relatives of the empresses, and Jurchen tribesmen with military merit and those who participated in decision-making in the inner circle of the government. Less important were the great families of the north. Still less important were the *jinshi* (presented scholars). The use of the so-called *jinshi* was specifically for the purpose of showing fairness to the people and earning their confidence. Thus power was distributed by a comparison of

[11] Bol, "Seeking Common Ground," p. 478. Bol quotes these figures from Tao, *The Jurchen in Twelfth Century China*, who has based them on a survey of the biographies in the *Jinshi*.

people's respective favours, and the rulers possessed different feelings toward different peoples.[12]

Apart from the existence of the "rapid promotion scheme" (*chaoqian ge* 超遷格) which made Jurchens eligible for promotion much earlier than other ethnic groups,[13] and the hereditary protection available to them,[14] another reason for this under-use was the existence of the clerkship position. By this route, men who did not have a *jinshi* degree could enter government and could then be promoted up through the ranks in an advancement scheme separate to that of the officials recruited through the examination route. It should be remembered that it was not only from the Northern Song that the Jin dynasty adopted its governmental patterns. The Jurchen were exposed to and adopted some systems from the Tang dynasty as a result of their contact with the earlier Liao dynasty, which was itself based in part on the Tang model. One such system was this recruitment of high officials from the ranks of the clerkship. In effect the Jin system was one whereby the Northern Song model of recruitment by examination was superimposed upon the Tang model of civil appointments.

Liu Qi gives us some further insight into the obstacles to literati advancement as he perceived them in his memoir writings. He points to the low quality of government officials and the lack of a well-educated literati presence in that government as one of the principal causes of the weakening of the Jin dynasty and its subsequent collapse. He tells of the way in which the later emperors appointed personal attendants from outwith the official route of employment and as a result "imperial relatives, members of the nobility or sycophants were elected to fill the position [of imperial attendants], whereas the scholar-officials were debarred [from these offices]."[15] He suggests that the types of men

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[12] Yuan Haowen, "Zhang wenzhengong shendaobei" 張文貞公神道碑 (Epitaph of Zhang Wenzhenggong) in *Yuan Haowen quanji* 元好問全集 (*Collected Works of Yuan Haowen*), 16.463. Translated based on one by Tao in *The Jurchen in Twelfth Century China*, p. 61.

[13] From his survey of the *Jinshi*, Tao estimates that on average it took a Chinese degree holder ten years longer than a Jurchen degree holder or a Jurchen imperial guard to attain a ministerial position. See *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[14] Wittfogel quotes Yuan Haowen as claiming that forty percent of officials entered official service through hereditary right. See Karl A. Wittfogel, "Public Office in the Liao and the Chinese Examination System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947), pp. 32 - 33.

[15] *GQZ*, 7.58.

selected for high position were more concerned with securing their own position than voicing a dissenting opinion for the good of the state. He indicates the quality of appointments made in the following passage:

> After the migration to the south, the councillors [were so narrow-minded] that people other than their relatives or former associates were unable to enter the door [of office]. As to other officials and scholars, they seldom accepted opinions and suggestions and were anxious to preserve their position, afraid that they might lose it. Under these circumstances, it would be optimistic to expect them to employ the right men or well-informed people. [16]

As a literatus himself we could expect Liu to be of the belief that in appointing degree holders to office the government would be employing men who not only had the skills necessary to rule but also the moral fibre to put the interests of the state above their own as all good Confucians should. However, Liu does not lay all blame for the quality of official appointments on the existence of the clerical route, but rather considers the imperial examinations to be partly responsible. To Liu's mind, these examinations did not sufficiently test the abilities of the candidates and produced men skilled only in the types of literary composition tested in the examinations and not in the other skills necessary to govern well. He gives a damning account of the narrowness of the imperial examination in the following passage:

> During the Jin dynasty, the civil service system placed heavy emphasis on the candidate's mastery of poetic-prose and therefore the candidates often had no time to pursue their studies [in other fields] and practise other forms of writings...Therefore, the scholars were only skilled in composing poetic prose, and when they were asked about other styles of writing, they were completely at a loss...The fault lies with the practice of the authorities in testing [the candidate's] mastery of poetic prose, paying little attention to his competence in poetry, or in proposing solutions [for a definite problem] or engaging in discussions [of a particular theme]. [17]

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[16] *GQZ*, 7.52. Translated by Hok-lam Chan, *The Historiography of the Chin*, pp. 148 – 149.
[17] *GQZ*, 8.61.

Here we can see that Liu felt it to be a considerable problem that aspiring officials were forced by the examination system to severely limit the scope of their studies. He felt that the examiners, as agents of the government, were not seeking the range of skills necessary for good government. Liu further lamented the resultant deterioration of literature that this situation caused. We should not, however, think that his lament is for the state of literature alone. As Tillman explains, in writing of the examination system, Liu is more broadly referring to the moral and social order due to the notion that literary writings exemplified a person's moral character and through the projection of that moral character into the public realm, the spheres of government, administration and bureaucracy also. To quote Tillman, "[t]he net result is that, in Liu [Qi's] mind, this decline of literature and personal morality exemplified the wholesale degeneration of the cultural Zeitgeist."[18]

This commonly recognized decline in examination standards may also have exerted influence on Wang Ruoxu's *shihua* criticism. While he does not refer directly to the examination system in his *shihua*, he may well have been tempted to think of this work as being a prescription to overhaul the literary and moral standards of his day, especially in light of the fact that he was a student of Zhao Bingwen, the man who was particularly intent on revising the examination system. Certainly if Wang did indeed harbour these sorts of notions, that would help to explain the very heavy-handed, overly zealous approach he takes in his *shihua*.

In his illuminating study "Han Literati Under Jurchen Rule" Peter Bol sets out to establish the reasons for the curious patronage of the Chinese literati by the later Jurchen emperors. He asserts that "[d]uring the course of Chin history…certain Jurchens and Hans came to identify the complex of institutions, traditions, and values of dynastic government as aspects of *wen* (civil order)."[19] He continues on to argue that the Jurchen rulers felt that a man educated in "the ideals of the cultural and textual tradition" would be considerably more loyal to a centralized state in civil order than a man serving for

[18] Tillman & West, "Introduction" in *China Under Jurchen Rule*, p. 6.
[19] Bol, "Seeking Common Ground," p. 486.

other, more practical reasons. That *wen* was indeed a central concept in the later part of the Jin period, specifically the reign of Shizong onward, can be seen in comments made by Yuan Haowen. Yuan claimed that "*wenzhi* 文治 (civil order) was harmonious and education perfect" and that "the *daotong* 道統 (transmission of the Way) was opened and *wenzhi* flourished."[20]

It seems perfectly reasonable to imagine that faced with the prospect of rulers who sought to cultivate the Confucian ideal of *wen* in all its constituent senses, Wang's predecessors in the educated classes would be quick to rise to the challenge of reviving the literati class and helping to promote *wen*. Wang and his generation would then have sought to consolidate this situation. As a result, throughout his literary criticism as well as his writings on the classics and histories, we see a sustained concern with Confucian-based principles such as sincerity (*shi*) and principle (*li*) as well as the idea that the message expounded through a piece of writing (that is, the content) be of primary importance.[21] When faced with such a great task as promoting and ensuring the continuity of the Confucian tradition, it is therefore hardly surprising that content is of greatest concern to Wang Ruoxu and that this should be manifested in his *shihua* not only in considerations of the nature of writing, but also in a deep concern for the selection of words and phrases most suited to the clear and unmistakable transmission of those ideals.

It seems prudent here to return to the issue of the superimposition of the Song model of administrative recruitment upon that of the Tang which led to the advancement "loophole" of the clerkship, a loophole which belittled the worth of the literati degree-holders. There was some effort made on the part of the court to satisfy the degree-holders upset by the fact that it was possible to enter the government by the alternative and decidedly less arduous route of the clerkship. *Lingshi* 令史 positions (high level positions on the Presidential Council 尚書省) were reserved for Han Chinese degree-

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[20] See Yuan Haowen, *Yuan Haowen quanji*, 18.493 – 502 "Neixiang Wenxian Yangong shendao beiming" 內相楊公神道碑銘 and 32.728 - 732 "Dongping fu xin xue ji" 東平府新學記. Translated in Bol, "Seeking Common Ground," p. 490.
[21] See chapters 2 and 3.

holders and Bol assesses that if this applied to all the government departments there may have been as many as 250 such positions.[22] This served to give degree-holders an opportunity through promotion to attain a much sought after transfer back to the central government in the imperial capital, the majority of positions open to degree-holders being out in the prefectures.

However, these measures were not enough to mollify the literati, particularly when ever-increasing numbers of clerks rather than degree-holders were promoted into high positions during the turbulent period of 1213 – 17, when the Jin was reeling under the first wave of invasion by the Mongols. Liu Qi gives an account of the ill-feeling between the literati and the clerks in *juan* seven of his *Guiqian zhi*. The *Jinshi* also makes mention of this problem, as does Yuan Haowen.[23]

It seems probable that this undesirable situation facing the literati contributed to Wang's scholarly efforts. He, like many of his contemporaries, must have felt the need to "prove" himself to the leadership. For this reason it is difficult to dismiss completely the idea that ill-feeling at the "damage" done to the literati by the clerical service was one factor influencing, either consciously or subconsciously, Wang's poetry criticism. He surely wanted to make it clear that by virtue of their education the literati were better able to cultivate and promote the precepts and values of *wen* than were the clerics who, although practically adept, were deficient in learning and cultivation.

## The Duty to Preserve Traditional Chinese Culture

The preceding issues were ones concerned with the social and political administration set up by the Jurchen conquerors and the reaction of the Jin literati, among them Wang Ruoxu, to that administrative system. It seems prudent also to step further back and consider the reaction of the Chinese literati to the very concept of foreign rule and to the

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[22] Bol, "Seeking Common Ground," p. 482.
[23] *JS* 115.2531; *Yuan Haowen quanji* 38.73 –74 "Xiyan mu ming" 希顏墓銘 (Funeral Inscription for Xiyan).

arrival of the Jurchen in particular. This was by no means the first time that a part of China had been appropriated by non-Chinese conquerors. In recent memory the Khitan Liao had taken large parts of Northern China and the Tangut Xi Xia were an encroaching power on the western periphery. Earlier periods had seen the Xiongnu 匈奴, Di 氐, Qiang 羌, Jie 羯 and Badi 巴氐 peoples (collectively known as the "five barbarians" (*wuhu* 五胡)) establish the Sixteen Kingdoms, which covered the regions of northern China and Sichuan between 304 and 439, and the Xianbei 鮮卑 people founded the Northern Dynasties 北朝 of 386 – 581.[24]

This was, however, the first period of rule by foreign powers since literati culture had reached a state of sophisticated development under the Northern Song. The Liao had co-existed with the Northern Song but their dynasty was modelled on the Tang dynasty, a time when literati culture was in its infancy and the literati had exerted minimal influence in the governing of the state. Prior periods of foreign rule simply resulted in a dampening of creative output, whether literary or philosophical. Thus there was no precedent to guide the literati class of the Jin dynasty as they found themselves in circumstances different from those of their predecessors in the Northern Song era.

Traditionally these periods of foreign rule were seen as black episodes in the history of China when traditional Chinese culture was subdued. The Jurchen, however, were extremely keen to adopt Chinese culture and to legitimize themselves as a part of Chinese tradition, and consequently the Jin dynasty is widely acknowledged as being the foreign dynasty to have become most "sinicized" before the Manchus. However, to the Han Chinese literati of the time who were well conversant with history and the traditional view held of conquering peoples (the Sixteen Dynasties were not even recognized as legitimate dynasties and were therefore denied the writing of official histories), the Jurchen remained a foreign people and, as such, "barbarians" who needed to be educated in the Chinese tradition and from whose crude practices that tradition ought to be protected.

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[24] For further information see Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 174 – 201.

The perceived responsibility to preserve and transmit the wisdom and values of antiquity had always been an integral part of Confucian culture. The famous adage of Confucius stating that upon the death of King Wen, the guardian of culture, a state of moral and social disorder had ensued and that it was his [Confucius'] responsibility to preserve and revive that culture, thus prompting him to compile the *Chunqiu* 春秋 *(Spring and Autumn Annals*) and *Shijing* is a case in point.[25] A famous example closer to home is that of the actions of Yuan Haowen, a Jin dynasty literatus of the generation after Wang Ruoxu. Fearing the results of the Mongol invasions and the downfall of the Jin, Yuan compiled the *Zhongzhou ji* and much other information which was later to be used in the compilation of the *Jinshi*. As the preface to this anthology and a series of five poems he wrote to accompany it illustrate, Yuan compiled these works in an effort to preserve the accomplishments of the great men of the Jin who had maintained and transmitted traditional Confucian culture.[26]

There are no writings which explicitly state the way in which the Chinese literati felt they should impart Chinese culture upon the Jurchen "barbarians." Certainly we can rest assured that the Chinese under the Jurchens did regard their conquerors as "barbarians." We can also be certain that by the last years of the Jin dynasty, the literati were aware that it would only be a matter of time before the Mongols completely conquered the Jin. Since *shihua* were usually written late in life as the words of a man with a lifetime of learning upon which to draw, Wang probably wrote the *Hunan shihua* either around the time of or shortly after the Mongol conquest. It seems highly probable that by laying out clear, consistent guidelines for the writing of poetry, and by implication the correct cultivation of personal morality, Wang Ruoxu felt that he was contributing to the effort to

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[25] In the preface to the *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan* 春秋穀梁傳 scholar Fan Ning 范寧 (339 – 401) talks of the decline of the Zhou 周 (c. 1027 – 256 B.C.) state as follows: "All under Heaven was unsettled, the Way of the king had ended. Confucius gazed at the violent flow of the cold seas and sighed deeply, saying, 'Since King Wen has died, does culture not rest in me?' This means that since the Way of King Wen was lost, the one who would revive it was [Confucius] himself." See Fan Ning 范寧, comp. & annot., *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan* 春秋穀梁傳, Sibu beiyao edition (Taibei: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), preface, p. 1b. Translation by Stephen H. West in "Chilly Seas and East-Flowing Rivers," in *China Under Jurchen Rule*, p. 285.

[26] See *Yuan Haowen quanji*, 37.60 – 61 and 49.398 - 99. For further information on the historiographical writings of Yuan Haowen see Zhang Boquan 张博泉, "Yuan Haowen yu shixue" 元好问与史学 (*Yuan Haowen and Historiography*) *Jinyang xuekan* (1985), pp. 92 – 99 and West, "Chilly Seas and East-Flowing Rivers," pp. 281 – 304.

bring "civilization" (that is, Chinese culture) to the barbarian conquerors, be they Jurchen or Mongol.

## The Question of Historical Legitimacy

Another issue which may have been of influence upon Wang Ruoxu was the ongoing concern over historical legitimacy. To the literati trained in the Confucian tradition (and Zhao Bingwen was very vocal about this), it was very important that the Jin be accepted as a legitimate dynasty correctly taking its place in the dynastic succession. It is not surprising that they would have a strong wish for the dynasty under which they lived to be judged by posterity to have been a legitimate one for the simple reason that their own works as Confucian scholars would be not be transmitted and seen as a contribution to the long history of Chinese culture otherwise. Trained in the Confucian tradition with its strong emphasis on leaving a name for posterity, it is understandable that the literati should have been concerned about the perceived value of their own contribution in the scholarly arena.

Evidence that legitimate succession was a concern during Wang Ruoxu's lifetime can be seen from the debate over the dynastic element which arose time and again in the Jin court. The Jurchen participated equally in this debate indicating the fact that by this time they considered themselves to be a part of the Chinese dynastic tradition. Shizong is recorded as having said that "my country defeated the Liao and the Song and occupied the legitimate position under Heaven" and referring to the neighbouring states as barbarians![27] The Chinese had long held the idea that a dynasty ought to adopt one of the five elements (*wu xing* 五行) of water, fire, metal, wood or earth, and in accepting the magical powers of this element would observe ceremonial rituals appropriate to it. As with the Northern Wei (386 – 534), the legitimacy of the Jin was seen as being dependent upon the choice of the correct element.[28]

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[27] Quoted in Tao, *The Jurchen in Twelfth Century China*, p. 87.
[28] Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), p. 483.

However, the discussion was complicated by the fact that the Jin conquerors did not simply succeed one single dynasty but rather had to position themselves with regard to the Tang, Liao and Song dynasties when trying to establish their place in the legitimate succession of dynasties. Three positions were advanced as to the correct choice of element. The first centred on the fact that omens relating to gold at the time of the founding of the Jin pointed to the adoption of the metal element. The fact that the metal element was produced by the earth element thus further suggested that the Jin should be seen as the legitimate successor to the Tang dynasty as earth was the element of the Tang. The second position held that the Jin should take the wood element as it is produced by water, the element of the Liao dynasty. The third advocated adopting earth as the successor to the Song element of fire. Zhangzong selected earth as the dynastic symbol, but the debate continued on into Xuanzong's rule.

That the continuation of the Chinese tradition with the Southern Song meant the Jin dynasty did not succeed in its desire for historical legitimacy is not relevant to the present discussion. The fact that dynastic legitimacy was evidently of such concern to the Jurchen and Chinese alike suggests that it must have been a point of considerable discussion for a long period of time and as such must also have exerted an influence on the Chinese literati who wanted to see themselves as legitimate successors to the cultural tradition and in this way afford importance to their work. While this debate is in no way mentioned in Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism, there is no reason to think that it did not give him a renewed sense of purpose and a need to prove his own worth as well as that of the cultural learning of his dynasty. This could again have led him to attempt to portray himself as a Confucian master through the projection of a firm, sustained argument focusing on Confucian values rather than on empty aesthetic ideals.

## Developments on the Philosophical Stage

A final point of interest is the influence of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism upon Wang Ruoxu. The latter part of the Jin dynasty saw a huge influx of philosophical and intellectual ideas. The greatest influence in the philosophical sphere was the arrival of

Daoxue 道學 (often translated as Neo-Confucianism) from the south in approximately 1190.[29] As Tillman has shown in a persuasive article, contrary to common belief Daoxue quickly became a part of literati culture in the Jin period.[30] Indeed Wang Ruoxu himself claimed that "in recent times, various Confucian scholars have been using Daoxue to gauge who is more learned."[31]

We know from comments in his literary collection that Wang Ruoxu was exposed to the ideas of Daoxue and had access to at least some of the writings of such Southern Song Daoxue thinkers as Zhu Xi. For example, Wang's collected works contain a postscript written for Jin dynasty philosopher Fu Qi's 傅起 (fl. late 12th century) no longer extant anthology of Daoxue writings entitled the *Daoxue fayuan* 道學發源 (*Expressing Sources of Daoxue*), a work for which Zhao Bingwen wrote the preface. There are numerous references to Daoxue in Wang's collected writings with particular attention to the commentaries of Zhu Xi.[32] Indeed Wang felt Zhu Xi's works to be the best commentaries on the classics even though he criticized them in many areas.[33]

However, while Wang did approve of some aspects of Daoxue thought and was pleased with the revitalization it had brought about in Confucianism, he differed from the Daoxue thinkers of the Northern and Southern Song in several regards. For example, we have already seen that Wang emphasized human feeling (*qing*) over human nature (*xing*). The Daoxue thinkers, however, placed greater emphasis on the doctrine of human nature.

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[29] Daoxue, or neo-Confucianism, was a highly intellectual movement which assimilated metaphysical elements from both Buddhism and Taoism and sought to explain the nature of man and his position in the Cosmos through the re-interpretation of classical Confucian classics and writings. It emphasized philosophical interpretations of the classics as opposed to the philological explications which had characterized the pre-Song period. Daoxue did not gain immediate acceptance and indeed was proscribed as false teaching which distracted men from the original, and proper, teachings of Confucius and Mencius. However, it was to become the most influential school of thought in the Yuan, Ming and Qing periods.
[30] Tillman, "Confucianism Under the Chin," pp. 71 – 114. For a detailed examination of the references to Daoxue in Jin dynasty texts see pp. 74 – 83.
[31] *Hunan yulao ji*, 25.158.
[32] Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130 – 1200) is famed for his role in the development of Daoxue Confucianism and as such is often compared to Saint Thomas Aquinas in the European Christian tradition. He was a brilliant scholar and teacher and a reluctant official. By the end of the Southern Song period Zhu Xi's interpretations of the classics were the most commonly used in the imperial examinations and in the Yuan, Ming and Qing periods neo-Confucianism was prescribed by the state as the proper standard for the education and examination systems. For further biographical details see also *Songshi*, 429.12751 – 12770.
[33] See Tillman, "Confucianism under the Chin," p. 80 & 95.

Further, while Daoxue focused on philosophical interpretations of the classics and rejected the exegetical approach of earlier scholars, Wang Ruoxu's classical (and other) studies exhibit a distinctly exegetical approach. Overall Wang seems to have felt Daoxue to be overly abstract and unable to deal with more practical matters and the issue of moral cultivation, and as such Daoxue did not exert much influence on his literary criticism, except insofar as it encouraged him to assert his convictions as to the correct form of Confucianism.

Buddhism had long before been introduced to the Jurchen tribesmen form Koryŏ (Korea) and since Buddhism was the state religion in the Liao period it was already in a strong position from the beginning of the Jin. The population of northern China was already practising the Huayan, Tantric, Pure Land and Luzong schools of Buddhism and these continued to flourish under the Jurchen. The Chan (Zen) school was introduced to northern China in the Jin period as a result of the Jurchen conquering some parts of the northern Song territories whose population practised Chan. It rapidly became the most influential Buddhist school.

A number of Jin dynasty literati such a Ma Jiuchou 麻九疇 (1174 – 1232) and Li Chunfu were vocal in their interest in Buddhism and others were more privately so, although it seems unlikely that Wang Ruoxu was among them. Buddhism did not generally meet with favour from the Confucian-educated literati. The prevailing attitude of these intellectuals is well illustrated by the mockery incurred by Zhao Bingwen when it was learned that he had taught someone the Buddhist salutation. This is likely what caused Zhao, a man previously well-disposed toward both Buddhism and Daoism, to remove all statements about these two religions from his collected works and entrust them to a local monastery.[34] Wang Ruoxu may have feared similar ridicule from his peers and thus did not publicly exhibit any Buddhist inclinations. However, the absence of any writings about Buddhism (or for that matter Daoism) in his collected works and the fact that there

[34] See Tao-chung Yao, "Buddhism and Taoism under the Chin" in Tillman & West, eds., *China Under Jurchen Rule*, p. 167.

is no anecdotal evidence in the *biji* of his contemporaries to suggest such an interest, makes this seem doubtful.

Wang was not openly hostile to Buddhism, and indeed one of his criticisms of Daoxue Confucianism was its intolerance towards Buddhism and Daoism. However, the fact that the *Zhongzhou ji* tells of an attempt by Wang Ruoxu and Zhao Bingwen to limit Li Chunfu in his outspoken support of Buddhism in his 1218 work *Mingdao qishuo*[35] does point to a certain degree of intolerance on his part, as does the refusal to acknowledge Buddhist-inspired poetic techniques in his *shihua*.[36] With its emphasis on metaphysics and transcendence, Buddhism was seen to be incompatible with the more down to earth nature of Confucianism which focused on civil order and personal moral cultivation in this lifetime. Confucianism was practically non-existent at the beginning of the Jin dynasty and thus had started out in the weakest position of the three doctrines. To the literati who were trying to re-establish Confucianism, Buddhism could only distract people from the cultivation of Confucian morals, thus threatening the revival and transmission of Confucian values.

The third arrival on the philosophical scene was the Quanzhen 全眞 (Complete Perfection) sect of Daoism.[37] Daoism saw considerable developments during the period of transition from the Northern Song to the Jin with the formation of the Taiyi 太一 (Grand Unity), Dadao 大道 (Great Way) and Quanzhen sects. The Quanzhen sect, which came to eclipse both the other schools of Daoism as well as Buddhism, attracted a huge number of followers. If Yuan Haowen is to be believed, one fifth of the population were Daoists in the Quanzhen sect.[38] Li Chunfu, among other well-known literati, was also

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[35] See *ZZJ*, 6.286.

[36] The degree to which Li Chunfu valued Buddhism over Confucianism and Daoism, despite his syncretist tendencies, is illustrated in his comment that "when, studying, I arrived at Buddhism, there was nothing left to be studied. I knew, therefore, that Buddha is the sage and that the [Chinese] sage is not a Buddha." Quoted in Yao, "Buddhism and Daoism under the Chin," p. 149.

[37] The Quanzhen sect of Daoism has continued down to the present day as one of the two principal sects of Religious Daoism practised in the People's Republic of China. The modern-day Quanzhen sect is made up of celibate monastic monks and nuns who focus on religious self-cultivation. For further information on the historic Quanzhen Daoism see Yao, "Buddhism and Daoism under the Chin," pp. 145 – 180.

[38] Indeed, a considerable number of literati were also attracted to Quanzhen. The degree to which Quanzhen influenced even literati circles can be seen in the fact that approximately two thirds of the *ci*

actively involved in propagating Quanzhen Daoism.[39] This sect was basically syncretist in nature and sought to unify elements of the three systems of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, instructing its followers to read the Confucian *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*), the Buddhist *Banruo xinjing* 般若心經 (*Heart Sutra*) and the Daoist texts of the *Daodejing* and the *Qingjingjing* 清淨經 (*Classic of Tranquillity*). The main goal of this sect was "to 'enter the Way,' to separate one's mind (spirit) from one's body (form), to let the body remain in the mundane world and the mind ascend to its heavenly dwelling."[40]

Once again, we do not see Wang Ruoxu openly denouncing Quanzhen Daoism, but neither was he personally involved in it. As with Buddhism, Wang must have seen Daoism as a threat to the continued transmission of the Confucian tradition. The attitude of Yuan Haowen, a literatus known for his dislike of Buddhism and Daoism, is likely representative of Wang Ruoxu also. Yuan found himself forced to acknowledge that it was the Quanzhen sect which had helped to restore social order (one of the primary responsibilities in Confucian thought) by giving shelter and relief during the turmoil of the change of dynasties, yet Yuan would far rather it had been Confucianism which had brought about this restoration.

Wang Ruoxu was clearly very aware of these new arrivals on the intellectual scene. We have already discussed the degree to which Wang felt himself to have a duty to preserve and transmit traditional (that is, Confucian) culture. It does not seem unreasonable to conclude that he felt a responsibility to protect traditional culture from these pernicious influences. The threat posed to Confucian culture by the doctrines of Buddhism and Daoism could only have reinforced Wang's sense of duty and contributed to the Confucian slant in his *shihua* writing.

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poetry written in the Jin period was by members of the Quanzhen sect and is not easily comprehensible without a knowledge of the doctrines of that tradition. See *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[39] For a detailed study of Li Chunfu's association with the Quanzhen sect and the interaction of this sect with Daoxue Confucianism, see Yun-hua Yan, "Li P'ing-Shan and his Refutation of Neo-Confucian Criticism of Buddhism" in *Developments in Buddhist Thought* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1979).

[40] Yao, "Buddhism and Daoism under the Chin," pp. 154 – 155.

In this chapter, we have demonstrated the range of factors which influenced Wang Ruoxu and would account for the strident slant of his poetry criticism in particular. Apart from a desire to correct the damage done to the poetic tradition by Huang Tingjian and his followers, a damage which must have seemed greatly amplified and dangerous in such a time of turmoil under foreign rule, hence the vitriolic attacks upon Huang as the instigator of poetic chaos, a number of other factors served to shape Wang's critical thought and influence the style of his *shihua*.

In the course of this final chapter we have seen that Wang Ruoxu was greatly concerned not only with setting straight the cultural records with regards specifically to poetry. He was also influenced by a number of other motivating political, social and cultural factors. First, his wish to participate with his peers in the literary debate of the day. Second, his desire to display himself as a Confucian master in order to leave a name to posterity by virtue of his cultural and intellectual contribution. Third, his perceived need to stand up for the literati cause in their fight to better their status and career prospects by proving their worth. Fourth, his awareness of the heavy burden of his Confucian duty to be a "defender of culture" in the face of foreign incursions. Finally, the need to assert the supremacy of Confucian values in order to counteract the strength of Buddhist and Daoist influence. The above factors formed a melting pot of influences which all played their part in the evolution and expression of the *Hunan shihua*.

# Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, a picture has been drawn of the various facets of Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism. It remains here to briefly consider these views with reference to the critical tradition in which Wang would have been immersed and to assess the degree to which he was individualist in his opinions.

Certainly antecedents to many of Wang's statements can be seen in earlier Chinese critical works. The most striking of Wang Ruoxu's concerns is that of the disparity between the content of a piece of poetic writing and the form used in its expression. As we have seen, Wang was highly disparaging of poetry which paid considerable attention to, or appeared to pay attention to, the mechanics of writing such as metrics or classical allusions. This can be seen as having its basis early in the tradition of critical thought stemming from the Confucian comments concerning the necessity of finding balance between content and form found in the *Analects*.

Wang clearly also accepts later developments voiced by such critics as Zhong Rong whereby personal reflection is seen as being of greatest importance in poetry. That Wang shared this belief can be seen in his strong emphasis on the need for poetry to be written as a reaction to one's own emotions (*zide*) and as a truthful representation (*zhen*) of said feelings. We have seen that Wang could not tolerate poetry in which he thought the author was writing simply for sake of producing a poem rather than as a reaction to his own experiences and feelings. He further seems to have taken displays of erudition or finely crafted language as evidence that the poet was not writing with the sole purpose of giving expression to his innermost thoughts and condemns such poetry accordingly.

The Tang dynasty progression toward ever more complex rules of rhyme, tonal variation and so forth did not hold the same attraction for Wang Ruoxu. We see little echo of such critics as Wang Changling who posited the importance of technical skill. Although there are comments about appropriate choice of language in the *Hunan shihua* and Wang does obviously expect that due care be exercised in that regard, there are no comments concerning prosodic features as so pre-occupied the Tang critics.

There are clear parallels between Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism and the tension between the Yuanyou and Shaoshu groups of the Northern Song period. Wang is very much continuing the discussions in which these groups had earlier engaged, debating the relative merits of naturalness and striking style. He seems to be completely at ease with the idea that poetry is a form of self-cultivation which was such a central part of Northern Song thought, and indeed we have evidence that Wang himself made much use of the new predilection for using the *shi* form as a vehicle for philosophical discourse. It is immediately obvious that Wang comes down on the side of the Yuanyou group, advocating as he does the natural expression of true emotion and the avoidance of embellished displays of skill and erudition.

Bearing in mind the degree to which his critical thought had firm roots in already well-established critical ideas, we cannot argue that Wang Ruoxu was individualist in his ideas, nor indeed did he contribute any significant developments in poetic criticism. Although his arguments are undeniably impassioned, his work has never been singled out as seminal in the history of Chinese poetic thought as have such pieces as Cao Pi's *Lunwen* or Zhong Rong's *Shipin*. Upon preliminary examination it does not seem that Wang's *shihua* was to exert any appreciable influence on later critics and theorists as did contemporary Southern Song works such as the *Canglang shihua* of Yan Yu, points from which were much discussed by and exerted considerable influence on later Ming and Qing critics.[1] However, this is a matter for further study.

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[1] For example Ming critics Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1472 – 1529) and Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551 – 1602) made much discussion of Yan Yu's ideas as did Zhang Zongtai 張宗泰 (1750 – 1832), Liang Zhangju 梁章鉅 (1775 – 1849) and Zhou Rong 周容 (1619 – 1679) of the Qing. For an informative discussion of certain ideas in the *Canglang shihua* and their reception by Ming and Qing critics, see Richard John Lynn,

This thesis asserts that the interest of the *Hunan shihua* lies not solely in the literary ideas it expresses. Previous studies of Wang Ruoxu, the principal ones being by Zhang Jian and Zheng Jingshi, focus on Wang Ruoxu from a purely literary standpoint and assess his work with no reference to the social circumstances in which he was living. This thesis suggests, however, that Wang Ruoxu's purpose, consciously or subconsciously, was not simply to participate on an intellectual, theoretical level in an ongoing literary discussion, interesting as he may have found it. As the last chapter attempts to illustrate, a number of social factors which arose from living under non-Chinese rule must have exerted some not inconsiderable influence on Wang Ruoxu. It seems reasonable to conclude that the need to prove the worth of the Han Chinese literati class to a non-Chinese elite and also to assert the legitimacy of the dynasty and the scholars who served under it as participants in the Chinese tradition would have manifested itself to some degree in the writing of Wang Ruoxu and his contemporaries. Even if these influences did not impact upon Wang's actual critical views, they must certainly have coloured the way in which and the passion with which he expressed them.

The vehemence of Wang's attack on Huang Tingjian is a case in point. During the Northern Song period, interest in Du Fu had developed to an unprecedented level and the way in which to produce poetry on a level with that of Du Fu was a major point of discussion. So varied was Du's style that the opposing Yuanyou and Shaoshu schools could both claim to be following in the footsteps of Du Fu. Curiously for one who seems to be otherwise so concerned with the Yuanyou – Shaoshu debate, Wang Ruoxu makes surprisingly little mention of Du Fu in his *shihua*. He concerns himself instead with Huang Tingjian, and to a lesser extent the Jiangxi poets who followed Huang, and the way in which he represents the antithesis of Wang's own ideals.

The fact that Wang Ruoxu concentrates so heavily on Huang Tingjian and makes comparatively little discussion of Du Fu can be seen as an indication that he had more than merely theoretical discussion in mind when penning the *Hunan shihua*. It seems

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"The Talent Learning Polarity in Chinese Poetics: Yan Yu and the Later Tradition" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews* 5 (1983), pp. 157 – 184).

more as though he is trying to actively correct what he perceives to be the faulty path down which Huang Tingjian and his followers have proceeded at the expense of the poetic tradition rather than to passively stand by and just offer his own viewpoint. To return once again to the arguments made in the last chapter, the likeliest explanation for this is Wang's desire to preserve the Chinese tradition in the face of not only non-Chinese rulership but also waves of invasion by and the inevitability of conquest by yet another non-Chinese group. Wang would far rather see the poetic values to which he subscribes survive the present turmoil and influence later ages than those of opposing schools of thought, hence his more immediate concern with Huang Tingjian and his pernicious influence on poetry than with a more abstract discussion of Du Fu.

In expanding the boundaries of this study to include social factors pertinent to Wang Ruoxu's poetry criticism it has been possible to consider the aggravating factors which led to his polemical views about and exceptionally harsh criticism of Huang Tingjian. Avoiding the application of sinicization theory as an approach to the study of this non-Chinese regime has further broadened the perspective of this study by allowing for the idea that the Jurchen may have exerted some influence, albeit indirect, on the literati tradition during this period.

It is hoped that this study will provide some additional material to aid in our understanding of this fascinating period in Chinese history. As Richard John Lynn points out of later Chinese poetry, "... we have not been able to see the individual trees in the Ming-Qing forest of poetry because we have not had the critical means to tell them apart... It is no longer valid to say that all these trees are alike, for they but seem alike to the untrained eye. The way the eye is trained, of course, is for it to become acquainted with the range of theoretical positions current at the various times and places which mark the tradition as it makes its way through time."[2] The same can be said of poetry in the Jin period, the *shi* and *ci* poetry of which has received little attention from scholars to date. The study of the poetry criticism of Wang Ruoxu, together with what comments remain from his contemporaries, can not only help us to understand more of the literary situation

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 183 – 184.

during the latter part of the Jin dynasty, but also serve as a starting point from which to delve into the poetry of this period as well as providing another small piece in the jigsaw that is Chinese literary history.

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# Appendix A

## Translation of *Hunan shihua*, p. 1.

The 'Poetry of Du Fu, Annotated by a Thousand Masters' which has been transmitted for generations has in it more than forty entries titled "new additions." My uncle, Master Zhou Deqing, once analysed them saying, "Only 'Recalling the Past at Qutang,' 'Ballad of the Open-beaked Falcon,' and 'Sending off Liu Puye: A Ballad on the Sorrow of Parting' are without doubt by Du Fu; the rest are all without true foundation.[1] Probably they were created by later imitators, those who wanted to steal [Du's name] in order to cheat the world. Perhaps they also recklessly wrote of where they got them from and falsely quoted famous scholars for support. None of them can be trusted.

[Su] Dongpo once said that among Li Bai's collected works there are often randomly inserted poems by other people since his heroic, vigourous style was wide-ranging and is therefore easy to falsify. But with [Du] Xiaoling this is decidedly not possible. How could he [Su] have thought that small-minded people would not fear to do this? The poems are mostly vulgar and stupid and are completely unreadable. It seems they were studying the Handan walk and losing their old style![2] [They] seek to fit in among the lesser [of Xiaoling's poems] but still do not succeed. Yet they want to be taken for Xiaoling's?! This is truly pitiful and laughable. Since Wang Zhifang in his *shihua* accepted them [as authentic] Bao Wenhu and Du Shike added their annotations and Xu Juren again ordered them. Truly there are few in this age who can recognise the genuine. One or two among [these fraudulent poems], although quite even and simple, still cannot avoid errors. When it comes to poems like 'Fleeing Calamity,' 'Consoling Grief,'

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[1] "送劉僕射・惜別行" is presumably the same as the poem entitled "惜別行送劉僕射判官" *in Quan Tangshi* 7.2582.

[2] From the *Zhuangzi* (莊子・秋水) parable "Have you alone, sir, not heard of that youth from Shouling who studied walking in Handan? Unable to get the abilities of people of that state he moreover lost his old

'Sending off Cui of the Bureau of Waterworks,' 'Hearing that Huizi passed by East Creek,' 'Watching the Water Rising at Baxi' and 'Presented to Commissioner Dou' they are particularly formless.[3] As for the remaining ones, they seem for the most part to have come from the same hand. The impossibility of their being confused with the real thing is like pellets of manure among Sui pearls: one doesn't [have to] wait to pick them up before knowing [which is which]![4] However, [some are] still unable to differentiate between them. In this world, there are innumerable such situations of struggle between people."

The reason why I get so worked up and discuss this to such an extent is not simply because of these poems. Since he was young, when it comes to composing poetry my uncle has followed Ancestor of the Public Works [Du Fu] and when he teaches others he introduces him first. One time he talked with me about these 'new addition' poems and knit his brows saying, "The difference between the talents of men is like [the difference between] their faces. Ears, eyes, noses and mouths; the distance between them is very little. Yet examine them closely and there are none which are not different. But when poetry reaches [the level of] Du Fu, how can the poetry of others be confused with it? That gentleman [i.e. Zhou] having such theories must mean his attainment [in understanding poetry] was profound. Looking at my generation I just haven't seen this and so I have explained and laid this out in order to wait for a clear-sighted gentleman.

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walk – he was only able to crawl on his hands and knees as he returned." I.e. to study someone else without mastering their skills but losing one's own at the same time.

[3] See *Quan Tangshi*: 送難 7.2583; 解憂 7.2584; 送崔都水 seems likely to be 奉使崔都水翁下峽 7.2586; 聞惠子過東溪 is presumably the same as 聞惠二過東溪特一送 7.2581; 巴西覲漲 and 「及」呈竇使君 are probably both parts of the same title, i.e. 巴西覲李覲江漲呈竇使君二首 7.2584.

[4] Reference to a story in the *Soushen ji* in which the Marquis of Sui came across a snake which had been cut in two. He applied medicine which healed the snake and the snake later repaid the debt by bringing the Marquis a pearl in its mouth.